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The Flu and You

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Get Your Flu Shot



It's not too late to get protected from the flu. Flu, or influenza, vaccination continues throughout the flu season, even in January and later. Flu season can begin as early as October, typically peaks in late November through March, and can occur as late as May.

What are the benefits of the flu vaccination? Flu shots protect against the 3 or 4 most common influenza viruses identified each season. When the vaccine closely matches circulating flu viruses, the CDC reports that vaccination can keep you from getting sick from influenza and significantly reduce flu-related hospitalizations and deaths among those with heart disease, diabetes and chronic lung disease.

With a few exceptions, everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every year, preferably by the end of October. If you are pregnant, ask your provider about getting a flu shot as part of your prenatal care.

Note: The CDC has resumed recommending the intranasal vaccine (LAIV4) for the 2018-2019 flu season. Learn more at cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/nasalspray.htm or ask your health care provider if you can use the nasal spray vaccine.

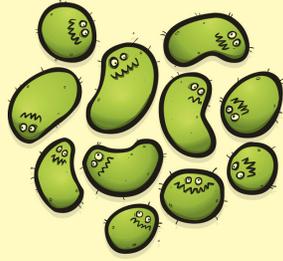
Do-It-Yourself Care for the Flu

The age-old advice to drink plenty of fluids still holds. But avoid alcoholic and caffeinated beverages, which contribute to dehydration.

- For a sore throat, gargle with warm salt water or drink warm lemon water with honey.
- To relieve congestion, hold your face over a steaming cup of herbal tea or bouillon or take a warm shower.
- Nonprescription drugs may help. Consider a nasal decongestant or saline nasal drops for stuffy nose, expectorant to loosen phlegm, and an analgesic (pain reliever) for aches and fever. **Carefully follow package directions.**
- A prescription antiviral can lessen flu severity. It's most effective if it's taken within 48 hours of getting sick.

Important: Antibiotics kill bacteria and don't work against viruses. Your health care provider may prescribe an antibiotic if you develop a secondary bacterial infection of the sinuses, bronchial tubes or ears.

Flu Germs Are Here



Keep your distance:

- Wash your hands often. Carry hand sanitizers.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated.
- Avoid the workplace when you're sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough; promptly toss the tissue in the garbage. If you don't have tissues, cough into your elbow.
- Keep your hands off your mouth, nose and eyes.
- Avoid people who are sick; coughing and sneezing are clues.
- Take care in medical clinics, your kids' schools and other public places.

The Flu and You: Personal Precautions



We are approaching the peak of **influenza (flu) season**, typically in late November through March. Here are answers to common questions:

How is the flu spread? Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. If you're nearby, these droplets can land in your mouth or nose. Less often, you might get infected by touching a surface or an object contaminated by the flu and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose.

How do I know I have the flu? Typical signs include coughing, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, chills, headache, unusual fatigue and sometimes body aches or fever. Children may have vomiting and diarrhea.

How long is the flu contagious? Your symptoms may begin an average of 2 days after you are exposed to the virus. If you are healthy, you can infect others beginning 1 day before your symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. It can be hard to distinguish between the flu and a cold or other respiratory illness based on symptoms alone. If your health care provider needs to know for sure, lab tests may verify your condition.

How serious is the flu? It can make some people very ill even without complications. It can sometimes cause complications such as pneumonia, bronchitis, ear or sinus infections and dehydration. It can also worsen many chronic medical conditions, especially congestive heart failure, asthma and diabetes.

How can I avoid the flu? Boost your immunity with positive health choices — nutritious food, sound sleep and low stress. An annual flu vaccination is the best prevention. It is highly effective for the overall population when most circulating flu viruses closely match the vaccine; it does not protect against all influenza viruses. The vaccine cannot give you the flu.



Is It a Cold or the Flu?

Determining whether you have a cold, the flu or some other illness is important for knowing how to treat your symptoms.

	Cold	Flu
Typical symptoms	Stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing	Fatigue, fever, headache, body aches and coughing
Symptom severity	Mild	Intense
Related problems	Can lead to secondary infections such as sinusitis	Can lead to serious problems such as pneumonia and hospitalization
Duration	2-14 days, usually 1 week	Up to 2-3 weeks with unusual fatigue

December 2 to 8 is Handwashing Awareness Week

- — a good time to learn the proper way to clean your hands and prevent the spread of illness: Wet your hands with clean cold or warm water and apply soap; lather by rubbing hands together, scrubbing the backs of hands, between fingers and under nails, for at least 20 seconds; rinse hands with water; and dry them with a clean towel. Always do this before preparing or eating meals, and after coughing, sneezing and using the toilet. Find more tips at cdc.gov/handwashing/.

