

Flu Symptoms and Severity

Influenza (also known as the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The flu is different from a cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever† or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

Flu Complications

Most people who get influenza will recover in 3-10 days but some people will develop complications (such as pneumonia) as a result of the flu. These complications can be life-threatening and result in death.

Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections are examples of complications from flu. Flu can make chronic health problems worse.

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but return with fever or severe cough†

†It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

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Influenza (Flu) Safety

Prevention, Symptoms and Treatment



Seasonal Influenza: Flu Basics

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. It has been recognized for many years that people 65 years and older are at greater risk of serious complications from the flu compared with young, healthy adults because human immune defenses become weaker with age.

CDC Says “Take 3” Actions to Fight the Flu

Flu is a serious contagious disease that can lead to hospitalization and even death. The CDC urges you to take the following actions to protect yourself and others from influenza (the flu):

1) *Take time to get a flu vaccine.*

- CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.
- While there are many different flu viruses, a flu vaccine protects against the three or four viruses that research suggests will be most common.
- Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses and doctors' visits as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations and deaths.
- Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine as soon as the current season's vaccines are available.
- Vaccination of high risk persons is especially important to decrease their risk of severe flu illness.
- People at high risk of serious flu complications include young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease and people 65 years and older.
- Vaccination also is important for health care workers, and other people who live with or care for high risk people to keep from spreading flu to high risk people.

2) *Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.*

Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

3) *Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.*

- If you get the flu, antiviral drugs can treat your illness.
- Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics. They are prescription medicines and are not available over-the-counter.
- Antiviral drugs can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For people with high risk factors, treatment with an antiviral drug can mean the difference between having a milder illness versus a very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay.
- Studies show that flu antiviral drugs work best for treatment when they are started within 2 days of getting sick, but starting them later can still be helpful, especially if the sick person has a high-risk health condition or is very sick from the flu. Follow your doctor's instructions for taking this drug.
- Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.



Older Adults Are At Risk

If you're 65 years or older, getting a flu shot is the best way to protect yourself and those around you from flu.

The upcoming season's flu vaccine will protect against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the season. This includes an influenza A (H1N1) virus, an influenza A (H3N2) virus, and one or two influenza B viruses, depending on the flu vaccine.

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The flu benefit is a covered service for Medicare and for children enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP.

