

A focus on INFLUENZA

What you should know about the Flu.

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year. Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- about 36,000 people die from flu.

Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications.

Complications of flu

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

How flu spreads

Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Apparently healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

Key facts about seasonal flu vaccine

The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year. There are two types of vaccines:

The “flu shot”: an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.

The nasal-spray flu vaccine: a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for “Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine”). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people two to 49 years of age who are not pregnant. The viruses in the vaccine change each year based on international surveillance and scientists’ estimations about which types and strains of viruses will circulate in a given year. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection.

Symptoms of the flu

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Diarrhea and vomiting (more common among children than adults)

Having these symptoms does not always mean that you have the flu. Many different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.

Diagnosing the flu

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other infections on the basis of symptoms alone. A doctor’s exam may be needed to tell whether you have developed the flu or a complication of the flu. There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long as you are tested within the first two or three days of illness.

If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about your illness, especially if you are at high risk for complications of the flu, you should consult your health care provider. Those at high risk for complications include people 65 years or older, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, and young children.



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Keeping you **safe** during **Flu Season**.

Good health habits for flu prevention

The single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year, but good health habits like covering your mouth when you cough and washing your hands often can help prevent respiratory illnesses like the flu. There also are flu antiviral drugs that can be used to treat and prevent the flu.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth due to the spread of germs.
- Practice other good health habits:
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Be physically active
 - Manage your stress
 - Drink plenty of fluids
 - Eat nutritious food

Antiviral drugs and the flu

While getting a flu vaccine each year is the best way to protect you from the flu, there also are drugs that can fight against influenza viruses, offering a second line of defense against the flu. These are called “influenza antiviral drugs” and they must be prescribed by a health care professional. These drugs can be used to treat the flu or to prevent infection with flu viruses. Influenza antiviral drugs only work against influenza viruses -- they will not help treat or prevent symptoms caused by infection from other viruses that can cause symptoms similar to the flu.

Antiviral drugs are used in different settings and circumstances to treat the flu and to help prevent people from getting the flu:

- Antiviral drugs are used to help control flu outbreaks in places where a lot of people at high risk of serious flu complications live in close contact with each other, like nursing homes or hospital wards, for example.
- Antiviral drugs are used in the community setting to treat people with the flu to reduce severity of symptoms and reduce the number of days that people are sick.
- Antiviral drugs are used to help prevent the flu for people who have been close to someone with the flu, or for people that need protection from the flu but they either don't get protection after vaccination, or the vaccine is unavailable or they can't get the vaccine because of allergies, for example.

While most healthy people recover from the flu and don't have serious complications, some people—such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions—are at higher risk for serious flu-related complications. It's especially important that these people are protected from the flu.

Remember, a flu vaccine is the first and best defense against the flu, but antiviral drugs can be an important second line of defense to treat the flu or help prevent flu infection.

Rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medications

If you get the flu, there are some actions you can take at home:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- Take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – and particularly fever – without first speaking to your doctor)

