

INFLUENZA (FLU)

What You Need to Know

What is flu?

Flu is a respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses.

Who can get flu?

People in all age groups can get the flu. Those at high risk for developing complications include children under the age of 2, pregnant women, adults over the age of 65, and those who have a chronic disease such as cancer, heart disease, HIV, diabetes, and/or asthma.

How is flu spread?

The flu virus is spread from person to person by droplets produced through sneezing, coughing, and speaking. The virus can live on surfaces for up to 8 hours at room temperature. Sometimes people become infected by touching objects with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose. You cannot become infected by receiving the flu vaccine.

What are the symptoms of flu?

Symptoms usually appear 1 to 3 days after exposure and start suddenly, with individuals feeling some or all of the following:

- Fever
- Headaches
- Body aches
- Fatigue
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Chills
- Sore throat

How long is a person contagious?

A person may be contagious **1 day prior** to becoming ill and up to **5 to 7 days after** becoming ill.

Is flu dangerous?

Flu can be life threatening. Most people have a fever for 3-4 days along with other symptoms that can last longer. However, some people may develop more serious complications which can lead to hospitalization or even death.

Is there a treatment for flu?

Prescription drugs called antiviral agents can be used to treat the flu. Children and teens with flu should not be given aspirin or aspirin products because of the risk of developing Reye's Syndrome. Talk to your child's doctor about what over-the-counter medications are recommended for use. For most, treatment involves plenty of rest and drinking fluids.

How can flu be prevented?

- Get the flu shot every year.
- Avoid contact with sick people whenever possible.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. This is how germs spread.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- If you are ill, wear a mask around others.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing, sneezing, or touching common surfaces like doorknobs, keyboards, and telephones. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.
- Virus in the air can spread between people more easily indoors than outdoors. Improving air quality, such as opening windows or using air purifiers, can help reduce the amount of virus you are exposed to.

Can you get the flu even if you get a flu shot?

A flu shot can protect you against the flu, but it is not 100% protective against all strains. However, your symptoms will likely be less severe if you receive the vaccine.

Hand washing instructions:

- Use soap and running water.
- Rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds.
- Wash all surfaces, including:
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
- Rinse well.
- Dry hands with a paper towel.
- Turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands.

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