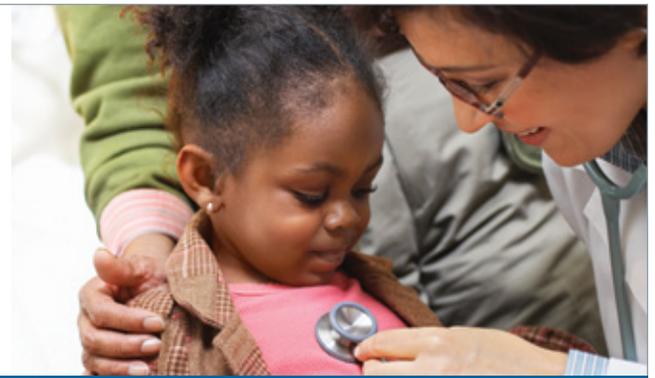


Flu facts



When flu season comes around, it is important to know the facts. Protect yourself and your family from infection by learning more about the flu. Then, take steps to prevent it by following these tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

What is the flu?

Influenza, or the flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. It may seem like just an inconvenience, but it can become severe or cause life-threatening complications. Symptoms may include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Gastrointestinal signs, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, are more common among children.

The flu spreads when a sick person coughs, sneezes or speaks. This sends the virus into the air. Then, other people may inhale it through their nose, throat or lungs. Once breathed in, the germs multiply and cause symptoms. Touching a surface with the virus and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes also can spread the flu.

When can a person pass the flu along?

Adults may be contagious from one day before developing symptoms to five days after getting sick. Children can be contagious for more than seven days.

Are there ways to prevent it?

One of the best ways to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated each year, if possible. This is especially important for people that are at a higher risk for flu complications. A yearly flu shot can help protect you from many common flu strains or help to reduce the severity of symptoms.

Who should get a flu shot?

Talk to your health care provider every year about getting a flu shot, especially if you fall into one of these groups:

- ▶ All children aged 6 months to 18 years
- ▶ All persons aged 50 years and older
- ▶ People with chronic medical conditions
- ▶ Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
- ▶ Residents of nursing homes and other chronic or long-term care facilities
- ▶ Health care workers
- ▶ People in contact with children from birth to five years

Who should NOT get a flu shot?

There are some people who should not get a flu shot without first talking with their doctor. These generally include:

- ▶ People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs
- ▶ People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination
- ▶ People who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine
- ▶ Children less than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for this age group)
- ▶ People who have a moderate-to-severe illness with a fever (they should wait until they recover to get a flu shot)

When is the best time to get a flu shot?

As soon as the vaccine is available. Yearly flu shots usually become available in September and continue throughout the flu season, into December, January, and beyond. This is because the timing and duration of flu seasons vary. While flu outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the time flu activity peaks in January or later.

Is the flu vaccine effective against all types of flu and cold viruses?

The flu vaccine is your best protection against flu viruses. However, the vaccine does not provide protection against non-flu viruses that can cause colds and other respiratory illnesses. It can sometimes be hard to tell the difference between a cold and the flu based on symptoms alone.

The flu vaccine won't protect you from cold or flu viruses that are already in your body when you get a flu shot. The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to provide protection from the flu and provides the best protection to prevent the most common types of flu.

Can a flu shot give you the flu?

No, you cannot get the flu from the injectable flu vaccine or from the flu vaccine that is administered intranasally (through the nose).

What else can you do?

It's important to be watchful to protect yourself from the flu. Consider following these steps to help prevent the spread of infection:

- ▶ Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- ▶ Stay home if you're sick.
- ▶ Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- ▶ Wash your hands often.
- ▶ Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- ▶ Practice good health habits.

What if you get sick?

Stay home and avoid contact with other people except to seek medical care if necessary. Get plenty of rest and drink lots of liquids. Avoid using alcohol and tobacco. You also can talk to your doctor about over-the-counter medications to relieve your symptoms. Never give aspirin to anyone younger than age 19. Aspirin has been linked to Reye's syndrome, a rare but sometimes fatal condition. Call your doctor immediately if your symptoms are unusually severe, or if you're having trouble breathing. Also call your doctor right away if you have symptoms of the flu and are in a group at higher risk for complications.

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