

Important Flu Facts

Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

What is the flu?

The flu, formally known as influenza, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus which can become severe and cause life-threatening complications. Unfortunately, the flu spreads very easily; when someone who already has the flu coughs, sneezes or speaks, the virus is sent into the air. As a result, other people may inhale it through their nose, throat and lungs, and once it's ingested germs easily multiply and cause flu symptoms. Even touching a surface that contains the virus and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes will spread the flu. Adults may be contagious from 1 day before developing the symptoms to up to 5 days after getting sick while children can be contagious for more than 7 days. It is vital to know the facts when flu season arrives in order to better protect yourself and your loved ones from infection by learning more about this illness. ⁽¹⁾

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms may vary but the most common ones are: ⁽¹⁾

- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough, sore throat and runny or stuffy nose
- Gastrointestinal issues, more common to children, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Fever
- Headaches
- Muscle aches

What can you do to help prevent the flu?

It's important to understand what you can do to help prevent you and your family from contracting the flu. Some of the steps which may help prevent the spread of this infection: ⁽¹⁾

- Practice overall good health habits
- Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes
- If you are sick, stay home
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth
- Wash your hands as often as possible
- Consider getting a flu vaccination

Will a flu vaccination help prevent the flu?

Flu vaccination is especially important to those people who are at a higher risk for complications should they become infected with a flu virus. Flu shots are the main method for preventing the flu and the severe complications that can arise for many individuals. The flu shot will protect you from the seasonal flu, H1N1 and other forms of the flu virus so individuals only need to get one shot. One misconception that some people have is that getting a flu shot can give you the flu. Inactivated influenza vaccines contain noninfectious killed viruses and cannot cause the flu. A yearly flu shot, usually each fall, is generally recommended for the following groups of individuals: ⁽¹⁾

- Children aged 6 months to 18 years
- Adults age 50+
- People with chronic medical issues
- People in contact with children age birth to 5 years
- Women who will be pregnant during flu season
- Health care workers
- Residents of any long-term care facilities

Who should not get a flu shot?

Some people should not get a flu shot without first speaking with their doctor. That includes anyone: ⁽¹⁾

- with a severe allergy to chicken eggs
- who had a previous reaction to flu vaccination
- who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 months of receiving a flu vaccine in the past
- who has moderate-to-severe illness with a fever
- who is less than 6 months of age

When to contact your doctor?

The most important thing to remember if you are ill with the flu is to get plenty of rest and drink plenty of liquids. Speak with your doctor about various over-the-counter medications that may help relieve your symptoms and, if you use alcohol or tobacco, avoid them while you are sick. Remember to never give aspirin to anyone younger than age 19 as it is known to be linked to Reye's syndrome. While a rare condition, Reye's syndrome can sometimes be fatal. Contact your doctor immediately if your symptoms become severe or you are having any trouble breathing and if you are in a high-risk group. ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ www.cdc.gov

This information is intended as informational only; not as a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.