



DISEASE PREVENTION

Influenza (The Flu)

What is the flu?



The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. There are two main types or strains of the flu virus; types A and B.

When is flu season?



Flu season generally starts during fall and peaks in the winter, but timing and severity of flu season can vary from year to year.

How is the flu spread?



Flu viruses mainly spread from person to person by droplets. This happens when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are sent through the air and land on the mouth, nose, or eyes of people nearby. Flu viruses may also spread when a person touches droplets on an object or surface and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes before washing their hands.

Who gets the flu?



Every year in the United States, part of the population becomes sick with the flu. Children younger than 18 are more likely to become sick with the flu than other age groups.

When and for how long is a person able to spread influenza?



Most healthy adults may be able to spread the flu others beginning one day before they feel ill and up to five days after becoming sick. Children and immunocompromised people may pass the virus for longer than ten days.

Some people can be infected with flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, they can still spread influenza to others when they sneeze or cough.

How soon after you are exposed to the flu do symptoms appear?



It can take one to four days (average two days) from when a person is exposed to flu virus for symptoms to develop. Flu symptoms tend to come on suddenly, while cold symptoms usually start slowly.



What are the symptoms of the flu?



People infected with the flu usually have mild symptoms and are able to manage their symptoms on their own.

The flu may include these symptoms:

- Fever (usually $\geq 101^{\circ}\text{F}$)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Weakness
- Dry cough
- Muscle aches/body aches
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are more common in children than adults.



Some people are at higher risk for serious complications from the flu and should talk to a healthcare provider right away if experiencing any flu symptoms. Taking antiviral medicine to treat the flu may shorten the length of your illness and help prevent more-serious problems.

In rare cases, individuals may develop serious complications with severe symptoms that require immediate medical attention.

Emergency symptoms may include:

- Difficulty breathing/shortness of breath.
- Chest pain.
- Ongoing dizziness.
- Seizures.
- Worsening of existing medical conditions.
- Severe weakness or muscle pain.

In children, bluish color of the skin and dehydration are considered emergency symptoms.

What can be done to prevent the spread of the flu?



1. Practice good hand, coughing, and sneezing hygiene.

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing, sneezing, or touching surfaces in public areas. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol may be used.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of tissues properly and wash your hands immediately afterward.

2. Stay home when sick.

- Return to normal activities when your symptoms are better overall, and you have not had a fever for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medicine.
- It is recommended you wear a mask for 5 days without a fever when returning to normal activities.

3. Get immunized every year!

- It is recommended that all people six months of age or older get a flu immunization in the fall.

MODIFIED 5.9.2024

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/flu

