

YCPARMIA Safety Journal

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Seasonal Flu (Influenza)

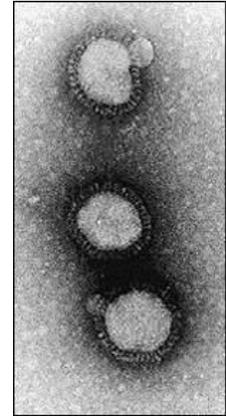
What You Should Know

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.



Symptoms of Flu

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- than adults
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children

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. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 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.**

Preventing Seasonal Flu: Get Vaccinated

The single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get a flu vaccination each year.

The Flu Season

In the Northern hemisphere, winter is the time for flu. In the United States, the flu season can range from November to as late as May. During the past 24 flu seasons, months with the heaviest flu activity (peak months) occurred in November one season, December four seasons, January five seasons, February ten seasons, and March four seasons.

Anyone Can Get the Flu, But the Disease Is More Severe for Some People

Most people who get influenza will recover in a few days to less than 2 weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications (such as pneumonia) as a result of the flu. Millions of people in the United States — about 5% to 20% of U.S. residents — will get influenza each year. An average of about 36,000 people per year in the United States die from influenza, and more than 200,000 have to be admitted to the hospital as a result of influenza. Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems from influenza can happen at any age. People age 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions, and very young children are more likely to get complications from influenza. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are three examples of complications from flu. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may have worsening of this condition that is triggered by the flu.

How the Influenza Virus Is Passed Around

The main way that influenza viruses are spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. (This is called "droplet spread.") This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled (usually less than 3 feet) through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

The Flu Is Contagious

Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 days **after** becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than seven days. Symptoms start one to four days after the virus enters the body. **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.** Some persons can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons can still spread the virus to others.

How To Know if You Have the Flu

Your respiratory illness might be the flu if you have sudden onset of body aches, high fever, and respiratory symptoms, and your illness occurs during the usual flu season in the Northern Hemisphere. However, during this time, other respiratory illnesses can cause similar symptoms to the flu. In addition, influenza can also occur outside of the typical flu season. It is impossible to tell for sure if you have the flu based on symptoms alone. Doctors can perform tests to see if you have the flu if you are in the first few days of your illness.

The Myth of the "Stomach Flu"

Many people use the term "stomach flu" to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many different viruses, bacteria or even parasites. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous or "sick to your stomach" can sometimes be related to the flu — particularly in children — these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease.

What You Should Do If You Get the Flu

- Rest
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- Take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu
- **Don't go to work.** You will only infect everyone else!!

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work against influenza. However, bacterial infections can occur at the same time or follow an influenza infection. The best way to prevent the flu is to get an influenza vaccine each fall, before flu season. October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial since most influenza activity occurs in January or later in most years.



Your doctor may recommend use of an antiviral medication to help treat the flu. These are prescription medications, and a doctor should be consulted before the drugs are used. Antiviral treatment lasts for 5 days and must be started within 2 days of illness. Therefore, if you get flu-like symptoms, seek medical care early.

Do Not Give Aspirin To a Child or Teenager Who Has the Flu

Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – and particularly fever – without first speaking to your doctor. Giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have influenza can be associated with a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome. Children or teenagers with the flu should get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids, and take medicines that contain no aspirin to relieve symptoms.

The 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” or FluMist®). LAIV (FluMist®) is approved for use in healthy people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant.

Each vaccine contains three influenza viruses—one A (H3N2) virus, one A (H1N1) virus, and one B virus. 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 2 weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection develop in the body.



Is It a Cold or the Flu?

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare	Usual; high (100°F to 102°F; occasionally higher, especially in young children); lasts 3 to 4 days
Headache	Rare	Common
General Aches, Pains	Slight	Usual; often severe
Fatigue, Weakness	Sometimes	Usual; can last up to 2 to 3 weeks
Extreme Exhaustion	Never	Usual; at the beginning of the illness
Stuffy Nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort, Cough	Mild to moderate; hacking cough	Common; can become severe
Treatment	Antihistamines Decongestant Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines	Antiviral medicines— see your doctor
Prevention	Wash your hands often Avoid close contact with anyone with a cold	Annual vaccination; antiviral medicines—see your doctor
Complications	Sinus congestion Middle ear infection Asthma	Bronchitis, pneumonia; can be life threatening

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