

February 2018: Influenza Safety and Information

CDC: What is Influenza (also called Flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. 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 vaccine each year.

Signs and Symptoms of Flu:

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms that usually start suddenly, not gradually:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in young children than in adults.
- *It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

How Flu Spreads:

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

Onset of Symptoms:

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus and infected to when symptoms begin is about 1 to 4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

Complications of Flu:

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

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Period of Contagiousness:

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. Although people with the flu are most contagious in the first 3-4 days after their illness begins, some otherwise healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

People at High Risk from Flu:

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems related to the flu can happen at any age, but some people are at high risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes people 65 years and older, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), pregnant women, and young children.

Preventing Seasonal Flu:

The first and most important step in preventing flu is to get a flu vaccination each year. CDC also recommends everyday preventive actions (like staying away from people who are sick, covering coughs and sneezes and frequent handwashing) to help slow the spread of germs that cause respiratory (nose, throat, and lungs) illnesses, like flu.

Diagnosing Flu:

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other viral or bacterial causes of respiratory illnesses on the basis of symptoms alone. There are tests available to diagnose flu. More information is available: Diagnosing Flu.



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Treating Flu:

There are influenza antiviral drugs that can be used to treat flu illness.

Protective Actions:

What should I do to protect myself from flu this season?

CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease.

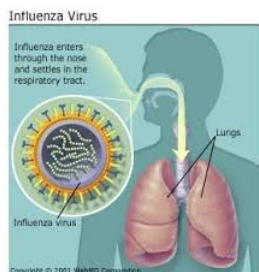
In addition to getting a seasonal flu vaccine, you can take everyday preventive actions like staying away from sick people and washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs. If you are sick with flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading flu to others. In addition, there are prescription medications called antiviral drugs that can be used to treat influenza illness. Visit [What you Should Know About Flu Antiviral Drugs](#) for more information.

What should I do to protect my loved ones from flu this season?

Encourage your loved ones to get vaccinated. Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for developing flu complications, and their close contacts.

Also, if you have a loved one who is at high risk of flu complications and they develop flu symptoms, encourage them to get a medical evaluation for possible treatment with flu antiviral drugs. These drugs work best if given within 48 hours of when symptoms start. CDC recommends that people who are at high risk for serious flu complications and who get flu symptoms during flu season be treated with flu antiviral drugs as quickly as possible.

People who are not at high risk for serious flu complications may also be treated with flu antiviral drugs, especially if treatment can begin within 48 hours.



Do some children require two doses of flu vaccine?

Yes.

Some children 6 months through 8 years of age will require two doses of flu vaccine for adequate protection from flu.

Children in this age group who are getting vaccinated for the first time will need two doses of flu vaccine, spaced at least 28 days apart.

Children who have only received one dose in their lifetime also need two doses.

Your child's doctor or other health care professional can tell you if your child needs two doses of flu vaccine. Visit [Children, the Flu, and the Flu Vaccine](#) for more information.

When should I get vaccinated?

Getting vaccinated before flu activity begins helps protect you once the flu season starts in your community. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the body's immune response to fully respond and for you to be protected so make plans to get vaccinated.

CDC recommends that people get a flu vaccine by the end of October, if possible. However, getting vaccinated later can still be beneficial.

CDC recommends ongoing flu vaccination as long as influenza viruses are circulating, even into January or later.

Children aged 6 months through 8 years old who need two doses of vaccine should get the first dose as soon as possible to allow time to get the second dose before the start of flu season. The two doses should be given at least 28 days apart.

Can I get vaccinated and still get the flu?

Yes. It's possible to get sick with the flu even if you have been vaccinated (although you won't know for sure unless you get a flu test). This is possible for the following reasons:

You may be exposed to a flu virus shortly before getting vaccinated or during the period that it takes the body to gain protection after getting vaccinated. This exposure may result in you becoming ill with flu before the vaccine begins to protect you. (About 2 weeks after vaccination antibodies that provide protection develop in the body.)

References: CDC