

How do you protect yourself against the flu?

The best way to protect against the flu is for individuals, especially people at high risk for serious complications from the flu, to get a vaccination each fall. However, there are other good health habits that can help prevent the flu. These are:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.



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Flu: Common Questions Answered

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Questions and Answers

What is influenza (flu)?

"The flu" is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

How does the flu spread?

Flu is typically spread person to person in the fluids from coughs and sneezes. Though much less frequent, the virus also can be spread when a person touches fluid droplets on another person or object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

- Fever
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches

Children can have additional stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, but these symptoms are uncommon in adults.

How long is a person with the flu virus contagious?

The period when an infected person is contagious depends on the age and health of the person. The healthier the person, the shorter time period they are contagious, usually 1 day prior to becoming sick and for 5 days after they develop symptoms. Young children and people with weakened immune systems may be contagious for longer than a week.

What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two types of illnesses have similar flu-like symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do

not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

Why should I get a flu vaccine?

Influenza (flu) is a serious disease, and people of any age can get sick. In an average year, the flu causes 36,000 deaths (mostly among those aged 65 years or older) and more than 200,000 hospitalization in the United States. The "flu season" in the United States is usually from November through April each year. During this time, flu viruses are circulating in the population. An annual flu vaccine (either the flu shot or the nasal-spray vaccine) is the best way to reduce the chances that you will get the flu.



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