

Infection Prevention and You



Influenza

Seasonal influenza, often referred to simply as “the flu,” is associated with approximately 200,000 hospital admissions and as many as 49,000 deaths annually in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications.

The flu is caused by influenza viruses, which target respiratory areas such as the nose, throat, and lungs. This virus can cause severe illness and even life-threatening complications. In the United States, an estimated 5 to 15 percent of the population is affected by the virus each year. The flu can live on surfaces between two to eight hours.

There is still time to get your flu shot. Even healthy people can get sick enough to miss work or school for a significant amount of time or even be hospitalized. Flu activity usually peaks in the U.S. in January or February. However, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May.

Flu symptoms include:

- A 100 degree F or higher fever or feeling feverish (not everyone with the flu has a fever)
- A cough and/or sore throat
- A runny or stuffy nose
- Headaches and/or body aches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea (most common in children)

Get vaccinated

The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated each year. A flu vaccine is needed this often because flu viruses are constantly changing. It’s not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year. The flu vaccine is formulated to keep up with the flu viruses as they change.

Who should get vaccinated this season?

Everyone who is at least 6 months of age should get a flu vaccine. It’s especially important for some people to get vaccinated. Those people include the following:

- People who are at high risk of developing serious diseases like pneumonia if they get sick with the flu
- People who have certain medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, and chronic lung disease.
- Pregnant women
- People 65 years or older
- People who live with or care for others who are at high risk of developing serious complications from the flu (e.g., immunocompromised people, the elderly)
- Household contacts and caregivers of people with certain medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, and chronic lung disease
- People with HIV
- People with cancer
- People with heart disease and those who have had a stroke

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The flu shot: The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur are:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever (low grade)
- Aches

If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last one to two days. Almost all people who receive influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it.

The nasal spray flu vaccine: The nasal spray vaccine should not be used for the 2016-2017 influenza season, per the CDC. [Learn more about the nasal spray.](#)

Antiviral medications: *If you do develop flu-like symptoms, call your healthcare provider immediately or within 48 hours.* He/she can prescribe influenza antiviral medications that can reduce the duration or symptoms of the virus if taken early. Taking antiviral medications could help prevent serious complications and even death, especially for those with other chronic health conditions or weakened immune systems.

General tips on preventing flu-like illness

Most experts believe that you get the flu when a person with the flu coughs, sneezes, or talks and droplets containing their germs land in your mouth or nose. You can also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus on it and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose.

Here are some other tips on protecting yourself and your loved ones from the flu and other viruses:

1. **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.**
2. **Stay home when you are sick.**
3. **Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.**
4. **Clean your hands often.**
5. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.**
6. **Practice other good health habits like staying active, eating right, and getting enough sleep.**

No more excuses, get your flu vaccine!

Use the HealthMap Vaccine Finder to locate your flu shot. <http://flushot.healthmap.org/>

Additional Resources

[AHA - United against the flu - http://www.aha.org/flu](http://www.aha.org/flu)

[NFID- Prevent Childhood Influenza - http://www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/](http://www.preventchildhoodinfluenza.org/)

[NFID - Influenza - http://www.nfid.org/idinfo/influenza](http://www.nfid.org/idinfo/influenza)

[Flu.gov - http://www.flu.gov/](http://www.flu.gov/)

[CDC - National Influenza Vaccination Week - http://www.cdc.gov/flu/nivw/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/nivw/)

[CDC - Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine \[LAIV\] \(The Nasal Spray Flu Vaccine\) -](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/nasalspray.htm)

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/nasalspray.htm>

[Immunization Action Coalition - Influenza - http://www.immunize.org/influenza/](http://www.immunize.org/influenza/)

[Flu F.A.C.T.S - http://www.flufacts.com/index.jsp \(there is an iPhone "Fight the Flu" App on this site\)](http://www.flufacts.com/index.jsp)

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