

Flu Prevention and Treatment Tips

Influenza, or the “flu,” is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus that infects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. Although symptoms in some people are mild, the flu can cause severe illness, and even death. Older adults bear the greatest burden from the flu. Compared to younger people, older adults are at higher risk for serious flu complications, including bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of other medical conditions such as heart failure, diabetes, and lung disease. People age 65 and older account for 50-70% of flu-related hospitalizations, and 70-90% of flu-related deaths. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu shot every year at the start of the flu season (early fall).

Flu Symptoms

The flu is different from a cold. Cold symptoms are usually milder than flu, and people with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose than people with the flu. The flu comes on suddenly and the symptoms are more severe. Some common flu symptoms include:

- **Fever or chills** (older adults may not have a fever)
- **Cough**
- **Sore throat**
- **Vomiting and diarrhea** (more common in children)
- **Runny or stuffy nose**
- **Muscle or body aches**
- **Headache**
- **Fatigue**

Stop the spread of flu with these simple precautions:

- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water, or with an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after coughing or sneezing, and before eating.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, use the upper part of your sleeve.
- **Avoid touching** your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick.
- **Stay home** when you are sick.
- **Get plenty of sleep**, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently-touched surfaces, especially when someone is sick.

What to Do if You Get the Flu

Call your healthcare provider

If you or someone you care for has symptoms of the flu, contact your healthcare provider immediately. Your provider can prescribe an antiviral drug to make the symptoms milder, shorten the time you are sick, and prevent complications from the flu. These medications work best when started early - within 2 days of becoming sick - so call your provider as soon as possible.

Stay home

If you think you might have the flu, stay home for seven days since your symptoms began, or until your symptoms have been gone for 24 hours. This will keep you from spreading the virus to others.

Get some much needed rest

To help your body fight the flu, get enough sleep and drink plenty of fluids, such as juice, water, and soup, to prevent dehydration. Because you might be cold one minute and hot the next, wear layers so you can easily add or remove clothes as needed.

Look out for Emergency Warning Signs

Call your healthcare provider or go to the emergency room immediately if you have any of these symptoms:

- High or prolonged fever (above 101-102°F or a fever lasting more than 3-5 days)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Fainting or near-fainting
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting and/or the inability to keep down food or water

Anyone living alone should get help quickly, instead of waiting.