

# Flu Prevention and Treatment

The flu can make you feel miserable. Sometimes the effects are mild, but sometimes they are very serious, in some cases deadly. The flu is a contagious virus that attacks your nose, throat and lungs. It spreads through the air in droplets when someone talks, coughs, or sneezes.

You can pass the flu virus to other people when you are sick, but you can also pass it on before you even know you are sick.

You are most contagious in the first three to four days after you have become sick, but some healthy adults may be able to infect other people one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick.

For many people the flu can cause: Fever, chills, coughing, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, headaches, muscle or body aches, and tiredness. But for some people, especially those over the age of 65, pregnant women, young children, and those with a weakened immune system, the flu can cause serious, even life-threatening health problems like pneumonia. It can also make chronic health conditions like heart failure, asthma, or diabetes worse.

The best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated every year. Most vaccines are given by injection, but you can also the flu vaccine in a nasal spray. Check with your healthcare provider to see what is available and best for you.

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after you are vaccinated. The antibodies fight against the flu virus to protect you. The influenza vaccine is safe, but as with any medication, there is a small risk of side effects. The most common side effect of getting a flu shot is an allergic reaction at the injection site. Watch for: redness, swelling or soreness at the site. These should go away within a few days. If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine, talk to your healthcare provider before getting vaccinated.

New seasonal flu vaccines are usually available beginning in September every year. Schedule an appointment with your healthcare provider to get your vaccine. You can also stop by your local pharmacy or health clinic. Getting vaccinated every year is the most important step to protect you against the flu, but you also need to develop healthy habits to further protect yourself.

Stay away from people who are sick, cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough, and cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your elbow. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water—if there is no soap available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Keep your immune system strong by choosing healthy foods, exercising and getting plenty of sleep. And clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu. If, even with all your prevention efforts, you get the flu, stay home. You should stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. Get plenty of rest and drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Antiviral medications may be a treatment option for you. These medications can make you feel better faster and may prevent serious complications like pneumonia. They are not sold over-the-counter, you need a prescription from your healthcare provider. But remember, antiviral medications are not a substitute for a getting a flu vaccine.

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The flu can cause serious, sometimes life-threatening health problems. The good news is it can be prevented by getting vaccinated every year, washing your hands often, staying away from people who have the flu and cleaning often.

These actions will go a long way to helping you stay healthy and stopping the flu from spreading.