

What to do if you get the Flu?

Symptoms of influenza (“the flu”)

Flu symptoms can often be confused with the common cold, but the flu usually comes on more suddenly and is more severe. Symptoms of flu may include:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness and weakness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body or muscle aches
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (much more common among children than adults)

When are you contagious?

A person who is sick with the flu can spread viruses. That means they are contagious. Adults are usually contagious from one day before having symptoms to seven days after getting sick. Children can be contagious for longer than seven days.

What to do if you get sick with flu:

Most people get well within one to two weeks. But some people can develop life-threatening complications (such as pneumonia) as a result of the flu. If you start to get flu symptoms:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Don’t use alcohol or tobacco.
- Stay home from work or school to protect others from catching your illness.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze.
- Take medication to lessen the symptoms of flu, but NEVER give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, especially fever, without first checking with your health care provider.

Call your health care provider right away if your flu symptoms are very serious.

Look out for Emergency Warning Signs

There are “emergency warnings signs” for children and adults that require urgent medical attention. Call your doctor or go to the emergency room immediately if you or someone you know is having any of the symptoms in the following lists. You may be asked to wear a mask or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick.

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Emergency Warning Signs for Children

Call your doctor or go to the emergency room immediately if your child has any of these symptoms:

- High or prolonged fever
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Changes in mental state such as not waking up or interacting; being so cranky that they don't want to be held; seizures
- Flu-like symptoms get better but then return with fever and worse cough

Emergency Warning Signs for Adults

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

- High or prolonged fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Near-fainting or fainting
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

If you are at special risk from complications of flu, call as soon as symptoms begin.

People at special risk of flu complications include:

- People age 65 and older
- People of any age with chronic medical conditions
- Pregnant women
- Young children

Complications of flu include pneumonia, bronchitis, dehydration, and sinus and ear infections. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may get worse.

Antiviral Drugs

In some cases, your health care provider may choose to use certain antiviral drugs to treat the flu. Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics don't work to cure it. Four anti-viral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, zanamavir, oseltamivir) are approved for treatment of the flu, but must be prescribed by a doctor. Antiviral treatment lasts for five days and must be started within two days of illness.

Influenza-like Illnesses

There are other respiratory viruses that can spread during the flu season and cause symptoms and illness similar to flu. These non-flu viruses include rhinovirus (one cause of the "common cold") and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). RSV is the most common cause of serious respiratory illness in young children and a common cause of death from respiratory illness in people age 65 and older.