

Flu (Influenza) Facts: Prevention and Treatment

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu viruses spread through the air when a person sneezes, coughs, or speaks. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

Healthy people may be able to infect others **1 day before** getting symptoms and up to **5 days after** getting sick. Therefore, it is possible to give someone the flu before you know you are sick as well as while you are sick.



Steps to Prevent Getting the Flu:

1. **Get a flu shot**—the single most effective way to prevent getting the flu!
2. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
4. 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.
5. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.



Symptoms

Influenza (the flu) starts suddenly and may include the following symptoms:

- 📌 Fever (usually high)
- 📌 Headache
- 📌 Tiredness (can be extreme)
- 📌 Cough
- 📌 Sore throat
- 📌 Runny or stuffy nose
- 📌 Body aches
- 📌 Diarrhea and vomiting (more common among children than adults)
- 📌 Having these symptoms does not always mean that you have the flu. Many different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.



Diagnosing the Flu

A doctor's exam may be needed to tell whether you have developed the flu or a complication of the flu.

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other infections on the basis of symptoms alone.



Taking Care of Yourself when You Have the Flu

- ☞ Rest
- ☞ Drink plenty of liquids
- ☞ Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- ☞ Take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu (**but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – and particularly fever** – without first speaking to your doctor.)



Complications of the Flu

- 🚑 bacterial pneumonia
- 🚑 dehydration
- 🚑 sinus problems
- 🚑 ear infections
- 🚑 worsening or difficulty controlling chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes.

Every year in the United States, on average:

- 👉 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- 👉 more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- 👉 about 36,000 people die from flu. ¹



¹ [Center for Disease Control](#)