

What is Influenza (Flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent this illness is by getting a flu vaccination each fall.

Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- More than 20,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- About 36,000 people die from flu.

Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications.

What are symptoms of the Flu?

Symptoms of Flu include:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle ache
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

Complications of the Flu

Complications of the flu can include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children can get sinus problems and ear infections.



Good Health Habits

- ***Avoid close contact.*** Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- ***Stay home when you are sick.*** If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- ***Cover your mouth and nose.*** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- ***Clean your hands.*** Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- ***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.

For more information on the Flu

- Visit CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/flu (source of information for brochure)
- Visit Georgia Division of Public Health's website at <http://health.state.ga.us/epi/flu/index.asp>
- Visit South Health District's website at www.southhealthdistrict.com

Signs, Symptoms & Prevention of Influenza

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How the Flu Spreads

Flu viruses spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person, though sometimes people become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day **before** symptoms develop and up to five days **after** becoming sick. **Which means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**

Help Prevent the Flu from Spreading

Educators, staff and parents can help slow the spreads of cold and flu. Always remind children to:

- Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze-have them throw the tissue away after they use it.
- Wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Remind them to not touch their eyes, nose or mouth. Germs often spread this way.

Fast Facts

1. Nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold alone.
2. Students need to get plenty of sleep and physical activity, drink water, and eat good food to help them stay healthy in the winter and all year.

Preventing the Flu: Get Vaccinated

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each fall. There are two types of vaccines:

1. The “flu shot” - an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
2. The nasal-spray flu vaccine- a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for “Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine”). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against influenza-like illnesses caused by other viruses.

When to Get Vaccinated

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.

Who Should Get Vaccinated

In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu can get vaccinated. However, certain people should get vaccinated each year. They are either people who are at high risk of having serious flu complications or people who live with or care for those at high risk for serious complications. If you have questions about whether you should get a flu vaccine, consult your health-care provider.

Who Should Not Get Vaccinated

Some people should not be vaccinated without first consulting a physician. They include:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past.
- People who develop Guillian-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously.
- Children less than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for use in this age group).
- People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms lessen.

If you have questions about whether you should get a flu vaccine, consult your health-care provider.

Diagnosing the Flu

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other infections on the basis of symptoms alone. A doctor's exam may be needed to tell whether you have developed the flu or a complication of the flu. There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long as you are tested within the first 2 or 3 days of illness.

If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about your illness, especially if you are at high risk for complications of the flu, you should consult your health-care provider. Those at high risk for complications include **people 65 years or older, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, and young children.**