



Influenza: Facts About The Flu

Most people experience several bouts of influenza throughout their lifetime. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), even otherwise healthy people can get sick enough to require hospitalization from the flu.

Influenza

The flu is an infection of the respiratory tract that is caused by the influenza virus. It is spread mainly through airborne transmission, when an infected person sneezes, coughs or speaks. A person can infect others one day before having flu symptoms and up to five days after becoming ill.

Flu Symptoms

Influenza is most often associated with the sudden onset of fever, headache, fatigue, muscle aches, congestion, cough and sore throat. Most people recover within a few days to less than two weeks. Occasionally, complications such as pneumonia, bronchitis or other infections can occur.

Prevention

The flu vaccine is your best chance of preventing the illness. Currently, the CDC recommends that anyone over 6 months of age receive an annual flu shot. Nasal sprays and egg-free vaccines are also available. While there are many different types of flu virus, the shot protects you against the viruses that experts believe will be most common that year.

Doctors highly recommend that those at high risk for flu complications—young children, pregnant women, people with certain chronic conditions (asthma, diabetes, etc.) and those 65 years or older—should get the vaccine each year.

Other tips for preventing the flu include the following:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay away from others when you feel under the weather.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. To avoid contaminating your hands, cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow.
- Wash your hands often using soap and warm water to protect against germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

- Clean and disinfect surfaces that may be contaminated with germs (counter tops, shared phones at work, etc.).
- Get plenty of sleep, stay physically active and drink plenty of water to keep your immune system strong.
- Manage your stress and eat a nutritious diet rich in healthy grains, fruits, vegetables and fiber.

If You Get Sick

If you get the flu, stay home from work or school for at least 24 hours after your fever goes away to avoid spreading the illness to others. To ease your symptoms try the following strategies:

- Stay hydrated and get plenty of rest.
- Try gargling saltwater made from dissolving $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt in an 8-ounce glass of warm water to relieve a sore throat.
- Drink warm liquids, such as tea and chicken noodle soup, and add moisture to the air with a vaporizer or humidifier to help ease congestion.

The flu is usually manageable with rest and over-the-counter medicine. If your symptoms are severe, though, your doctor can prescribe antiviral drugs to help shorten your sick time. Avoid asking your doctor for antibiotics, however, since they only fight bacteria and will be of no use against the flu virus.

Be sure to seek immediate medical attention if you display any of these warning signs:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with a fever and worse cough

By following the tips in this article and getting your annual flu shot, you can reduce your chances of getting the flu and stay healthy this winter.

Broken bones and bruises will heal, but a serious eye injury could prevent you from playing your favorite sport for the rest of your life.

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