

Key Facts About Seasonal Influenza (Flu)

What is Influenza (also called 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.

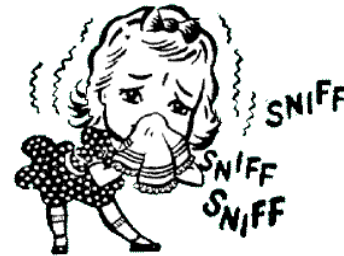
Every year in the United States, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu.
- More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications.
- 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.

Symptoms of Flu include:

- Fever (usually high).
- Headache.
- Extreme tiredness.
- Dry cough.
- Sore throat.
- Runny or stuffy nose.
- Muscle aches.



Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

Complications of Flu

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

How Can You Catch the Flu?

Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching the mouth or nose may infect people. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

Prevent Getting 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 vaccine;

- The **“flu shot”**- recommended for children/adults 6 months and older and
- The **nasal spray flu vaccine** - a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu. The nasal spray is recommended for healthy people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant.

Who Should Get Vaccinated?

In general, anyone who wants to reduce his/her chances of getting the flu should get vaccinated every year. However, the CDC recommends certain high risk people 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.

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People who should get vaccinated each year are:

- People at high risk for complications from the flu:
 - People 65 years and older.
 - *All children 6 months through 18 years of age**.
 - Adults and children with chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma.
 - Adults and children who have a metabolic disease (like diabetes), chronic kidney disease, or weakened immune system.
 - Pregnant women.
 - Adults and children with any condition that makes it hard to breathe or swallow, such as brain injury or disease, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other nerve or muscle disorders.
 - Children 6 months to 18 years of age who are on long-term aspirin therapy. (Children given aspirin while they have influenza are at risk of Reye syndrome, a disease of the brain with degeneration of the liver.)
 - People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- People 50 to 64 years of age. Nearly one-third of people 50 to 64 years of age in the United States have one or more medical conditions that place them at increased risk for serious flu complications.
- People who can transmit flu to others at high risk for complications. Any person in close contact with someone in a high-risk group (see above) should get vaccinated. This includes all health-care workers, household contacts and caregivers of children less than 5 years of age and adults 50 years and older, with particular emphasis on vaccinating contacts of children less than 6 months of age.

Who Should Not Get Vaccinated?

The following people should not be vaccinated without first consulting a physician:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- People who have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccination in the past.
- Children less than 6 months of age (flu 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 illness improves.
- People who developed Guillian-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously should consult their physician prior to getting vaccinated.

When Should You Get Vaccinated?

Get vaccinated as soon as the vaccine becomes available in your community. Vaccination before December is best since this ensures that the vaccine will protect you before flu season reaches its highest peak. Flu season can begin as early as October and can continue until the end of May.

What Else Can You Do to Prevent the Spread of Flu?

In addition to getting vaccinated, these steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses such as the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue away after using it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner or hand sanitizer.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the sick with flu-like symptoms, stay at home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. This way you will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread this way.

*Infants and children aged 6 months--8 years who have not been previously vaccinated should receive 2 doses of flu vaccine one month apart. Children in this age group who received only 1 dose in their first year of vaccination should receive 2 doses the following year, with single annual doses in subsequent years.

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