

Understanding the Flu

What is the flu?

The flu is a contagious virus that infects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. The best way to prevent getting the flu is by getting a flu vaccine every year and frequent handwashing.

Flu Signs and Symptoms:

Signs and symptoms of the flu usually begin 1 to 4 days after being infected with the flu. These may include:

- Suddenly feeling very sick
- Fever and chills
- Cough and sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Feeling very tired (fatigue)
- Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in young children)



When are people with the flu contagious?

People can spread the flu during the first 3 to 4 days of becoming sick. However, some people can infect others 1 day before feeling sick, and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick.

How do I prevent the flu?

- Get a flu vaccine every year
- Stay away from people who are sick
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth (germs spread this way)
- Frequent handwashing

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I heard the flu vaccine is not very effective this year. Should I still get one?

A person who has gotten the flu vaccine, and who has later been exposed to the flu may have a less severe illness if they do get sick with the flu. So it is recommended that you still get the flu vaccine even if it is less effective that year.

What do I do if I get the flu?

- Rest and increase fluids
- Use tissues to cover all coughs and sneezes
- Wash your hands often
- Stay home and avoid contact with others as much as possible until after 24 hours after your fever is gone
- Wear a mask if you must go out in public
- Call your doctor when you first get sick if you are worried, or if you are in a high-risk group
- Take fever-reducing medicine or specific flu medicine that can help with flu symptoms

How do I know if I have a cold or the flu?

Tests are available to diagnose the flu. Sometimes, it is hard to tell the difference between the flu and other colds. Here is a helpful comparison of common characteristics of colds and the flu:

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
How It Starts	Starts a little at a time	Starts quickly all at once
Headache	Rare	Common
Fever	Rare	Usual, lasts 3 to 4 days
Body Aches & Pains	Slight	Usual, often severe
Chills	Uncommon	Common
Tiredness/Weakness	Sometimes	Usual, can last 2 to 3 weeks
Runny/Stuffy Nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest Discomfort/ Cough	Mild to moderate, hacking cough	Common, can be severe
Complications	Sinus congestion, earache	Bronchitis, pneumonia, can be life-threatening

Source: Accessed 1-16-18 from: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm> | <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/coldflu.htm>

