

Flu & You



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for Immunization
and Respiratory Diseases

Influenza (Flu)

Flu is a serious contagious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes death. In 2009–2010, a new and very different flu virus called “2009 H1N1” spread worldwide causing the first flu pandemic in more than 40 years. Flu is unpredictable, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expects the 2009 H1N1 virus to spread this season along with other seasonal flu viruses.

How does flu spread?

Most experts think that flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. A person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own eyes, mouth or nose.

How long can a sick person spread flu to others?

People infected with flu shed virus and may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to about 5-7 days after getting sick. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems. This 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.

How severe is illness associated with flu?

Each flu season, different flu viruses spread and affect people differently based on their body's ability to fight infection. Even healthy children and adults can get very sick from the flu and spread it to friends, co-workers, and family. In the United States, thousands of healthy adults and children have to visit the doctor or are hospitalized from flu complications each year.

While flu can make anyone sick, certain people are at greater risk for severe illness resulting in hospitalization or death. This includes older adults, young children, people with certain long term health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease and women who are pregnant. (See “What should I do if I get sick?” for the full list of high risk persons.)

Prevention

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick from flu?

CDC recommends a three-step approach to fighting the flu: vaccination, everyday preventive actions, and the correct use of antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them.

#1

A flu vaccine is the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.

■ While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine protects against the three viruses that research indicates will be most common.

■ The 2010-2011 flu vaccine will protect against an influenza A H3N2 virus, an influenza B virus, and the 2009 H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season.

■ Everyone 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated against the flu each year.

■ Vaccination of high risk persons is especially important to decrease their risk of severe flu illness. Vaccination also is important for health care workers, and those who live with or care for high risk people to keep from spreading flu to high risk people.

■ Children younger than 6 months are at high risk of serious flu illness, but are too young to be vaccinated. People who care for or live with them should be vaccinated to protect these babies.

#2

Take everyday actions to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses.

■ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

■ Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

■ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.

■ Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

■ Stay home if you are sick to avoid spreading flu to others.

#3 Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.

■ If you get the flu, antiviral drugs can treat your illness. These drugs can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick.

■ Antiviral drugs work best when started in the first 2 days of symptoms to treat people who are very sick (such as those who are hospitalized) or people who are sick with flu symptoms and who are at increased risk of severe flu illness.

If You Get Sick

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with influenza symptoms you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to seek medical care. Most people are able to recover at home from flu without medical care.

However, some people are at greater risk of serious flu-related complications. They are:

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- People 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- People who have:
 - Asthma
 - Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy (seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability (mental retardation), moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury].
 - Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
 - Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
 - Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)

- Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
- Kidney disorders
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids)
- People younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- People who are morbidly obese (Body Mass Index, or BMI, of 40 or greater)

If you (or your child) are in one of the groups above and develop flu-like symptoms, consult a health care provider to get advice about seeking medical care. Also, it's possible for otherwise healthy people to develop severe illness, so any one concerned about their illness should consult their doctor.

There are "emergency warning signs" that should signal anyone to seek medical care urgently.

Emergency Warning Signs In Children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In Adults:

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

Are there medicines to treat infection with flu?

Yes. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu in your body. While a flu vaccine is the first and most important step in preventing flu, antiviral drugs are a second line of defense to treat the flu if you get sick. Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter; you must have a prescription to get them. Antiviral drugs are not a substitute for vaccination.

How long should I stay home if I'm sick?

CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick. Continue to cover coughs and sneezes and wash hands even after you return to work. It is important to know that even if you don't have a fever, you may have flu and be contagious if you get flu symptoms.

Flu Symptoms can include

- fever *
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

*It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

For more information, visit

<http://www.flu.gov>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

or call

800-CDC-INFO.

Topic: General Respiratory Illness and Influenza Symptom Management

Below are general guidelines to help you manage your respiratory symptoms. In general, combination products (Tylenol Cold & Sinus, Dayquil, etc) are not as effective as taking the individual components because of differences in dosing.

Also, generics are MUCH less expensive. All items listed are available in the UHC Pharmacy.

- Get more than the usual amount of rest. If you have fever or are taking medicine to reduce fever, you should not exercise until fever is gone and you feel better. In general, limit extracurricular activity until you are well. This should shorten the healing process.
- Drink plenty of fluids (~2-3 liters/day). This thins mucous, helps your immune system work and lessens fever. Humidify your room by running a cool mist vaporizer or humidifier, particularly at night. Keep the machine clean and replace filters regularly. Placing a pan of water by the bedside and steamy showers can also help.
- Antibiotics are not typically helpful, but if prescribed complete the course as directed until gone. Take all other prescribed medications as directed. If you are prescribed an inhaler use it with a spacer to maximize effectiveness.
- Warm saltwater (1/2 tsp salt in 1 cup warm water) gargles every 2-3 hours to soothe your throat. This will provide temporary relief and help to thin out excess mucus. Lozenges will also help to soothe your sore throat.
- Nasal saline rinses thin mucous, decrease congestion, reduce mucous production and decrease postnasal drainage. In general, it helps to promote a healthy environment in the sinuses and reduce your risk for developing a sinus infection. In the event that an infection does develop, it helps to reduce the symptoms. Nasal saline rinses are best achieved with the use of a neti pot, which can be purchased at low cost in the UHC pharmacy. Spray bottles, commercial products such as Ocean Mist and simply “snuffing” saline from your cupped hand may also be helpful and are also available in the UHC pharmacy.
- Elevate the head of your bed 15-20 degrees to help promote sinus drainage and lessen sinus pressure.
- For fever and/or pain: *Acetaminophen* (Tylenol) regular strength (325 mg)-2 tabs every 4 hours OR *Extra Strength Acetaminophen*, 2 tablets up to 4 times a day. May be taken alone or in combination with ONE of the following: *Ibuprofen* (Advil, Motrin) 200 mg- 4 tablets every 8 hours with food and full glass of water OR *Naproxen* (Aleve) 220 mg- 2 tablets every 12 hours with food and full glass of water. *Ibuprofen* and *Naproxen* have anti-inflammatory effects as well as help to control pain and fever, but may cause stomach irritation.
- For nasal congestion/stuffiness *Pseudoephedrine XR* (Sudafed XR) 120 mg (requires signature with pharmacist) - 1 capsule every 12 hours. Try not to take after 7 pm as this medicine can sometimes make it difficult to get to sleep. *Phenylephrine HCL* (10 mg), 1-2 tablets taken three times a day as needed, is a decongestant that is both effective and less likely to cause heart palpitations or disturb your sleep than pseudoephedrine.
- For severe nasal congestion/stuffiness and for immediate relief, use *Oxymetazoline HCl* (Afrin) nasal spray. Use one spray in each nostril twice daily for no more than 3 days OR one spray in each nostril at bedtime for no more than 6 days. Using this medicine longer or more often than recommended can cause rebound nasal stuffiness.
- For thickened mucus/cough: *Guafenesin/Dextromethorphan* products (Robitussin DM, Mucinex DM) are good cough suppressants and can be taken along with one of the decongestants above. Mucinex is a tablet form of *guafenesin* and helps thin out mucus. Mucinex-D is helpful if you need a decongestant instead of a cough suppressant.