

# FACT SHEET: INFLUENZA



## What is influenza (the flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills (not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults)

## How is flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses 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. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose. 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. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

## How serious is the flu?

Most people are able to recover at home from flu without medical care, but older people, young children, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease) are at greater risk for serious complications if they get the flu. Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions.

## How can I prevent seasonal flu?

The single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year. The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine every season. Vaccination is especially important for health care workers and for high risk people. Simple everyday actions can also help prevent the spread of germs that cause the flu and other respiratory illness.

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### **1. 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.

### **2. 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. You should 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.

### **3. 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. Make sure to throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

### **4. Clean your hands.**

Washing your hands often with soap and water will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

### **5. 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.

### **6. Practice other good health habits.**

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

### **What else can I do at work?**

- Find out about your employer's plans if an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs and whether flu vaccinations are offered on-site.
- Routinely clean frequently touched objects and surfaces, including doorknobs, keyboards, and phones, to help remove germs.
- Make sure your workplace has an adequate supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs, and disposable wipes.
- If you begin to feel sick while at work, go home as soon as possible.

**All information provided courtesy of The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

**Please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for additional information on influenza  
and best vaccination practices.**

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