

Seasonal Influenza (also called the "Flu") is a viral infection that typically circulates in the U.S. annually, most commonly from late fall through early spring. Depending on age and health status, the infection can cause severe symptoms which may require hospitalization. Influenza can be prevented by getting a flu shot and washing your hands frequently.

HOW DOES THE FLU SPREAD?

Influenza is spread via droplets from person to person. It can also be spread by first touching a surface or object contaminated with the virus, and then touching mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth). Influenza viruses can be found worldwide.



Seasonal flu occurs mostly in the late fall and winter, but can spread into spring.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF THE FLU?

The onset of flu symptoms is usually rapid and can include headache, fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, feeling weak or tired, and muscle or body aches. Some persons may experience diarrhea and vomiting, although these symptoms are more common in children than adults.



Seek medical help if you experience shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, sudden dizziness, or a relapse of initially improved fever and cough symptoms.

WHO HAS INCREASED RISK OF CONTRACTING THE FLU?

Although the flu is a very common infection, it can cause serious illness in certain people. Every year, 5% to 20% of the U.S. population contracts the flu, and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized following complications associated with the illness.

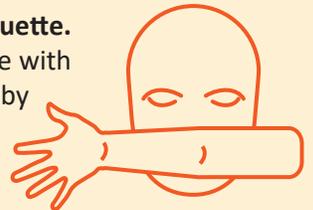
Adults over the age of 65, young children, pregnant women, and persons who are immuno-compromised or suffer from chronic medical conditions may experience severe symptoms which often require hospitalization.

HOW CAN THE FLU BE PREVENTED OR TREATED?

The flu can be prevented by receiving an annual flu shot. Although in some seasons the vaccine cannot provide complete protection, vaccination is still preferred as it leads to a significantly milder outcome of the illness in the case of an infection. Physicians may treat an acute influenza infection with antiviral drugs, although the illness does not usually require medical treatment in otherwise healthy adults.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Get a flu shot.** This helps prevent getting sick and spreading the illness.
- **Wash your hands frequently.** This is necessary after touching surfaces in public areas and shaking hands. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, as well as close contact with sick persons.
- **Practice good cough etiquette.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing, or by sneezing into your elbow. Dispose of any used tissues immediately and wash your hands.
- **Stay at home if you are sick.** Avoid close contact with healthy persons for at least 24 hours after your symptoms have subsided.



Persons who fall into the risk groups mentioned above should contact their physicians immediately if they suspect having the flu. Further spread of the illness can be decreased by practicing good cough etiquette and avoiding close contact with others while sick. Keep in mind that people are usually infectious to others before the onset of symptoms occurs.

REFERENCES

Prevention and Control of Seasonal Influenza with Vaccines: [Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices—United States, 2018–19 Influenza Season](#)

[CDC - Influenza \(Flu\)](#)

[County of Los Angeles Public Health FAQs - Influenza \(Flu\)](#)