

Flu Facts: What Everyone Needs to Know

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses. People get sick from seasonal flu viruses every year. Flu viruses spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes near another person. Viruses may also spread when people touch something covered with infected droplets and then touch their eyes, mouth, or nose. Flu can cause illness ranging from mild to severe. Once you are exposed to a flu virus and become infected, symptoms begin in about 1-4 days.

Signs and Symptoms:

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms that usually start suddenly, not gradually:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in young children than in adults.

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

Prevention:

- Wash your hands often throughout the day. Use warm water and soap. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow. Flu is spread through coughing or sneezing on other people or into your hands. Cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent others from getting sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth; germs spread this way.
- Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
- Keep surfaces (especially bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, and toys for children) clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant.

What you should do if you think you have the flu:

- If you have flu-like symptoms (fever plus a cough or fever plus a sore throat), stay home from work, school, or child care until you have been fever-free (temperature less than 100 degrees) for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Rest, drink plenty of fluids, and avoid using alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco.
- Contact your health care provider if you or your child develops flu-like symptoms and follow their recommendations for any needed medications.

Where Can I get more information?

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

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/08/rv/cold-flu-comparison.pdf>

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/12/nc/the-flu-guide-for-parents.pdf>

Colds versus Flu: How to Tell the Difference

Are you coming down with a cold? Do you have the flu?
Look below to see some differences and similarities between colds and flu.

Differences Between Colds and the Flu	
WITH A COLD:	WITH THE FLU:
Symptoms are usually less severe than flu symptoms	Symptoms are usually more severe than cold symptoms
Symptoms develop gradually over a few days.	Symptoms come on quickly and severely.
You rarely have a fever.	You almost always have a fever .
You feel sick mostly in your head and nose.	Your entire body feels sick.
Body aches, headaches and pain are usually mild if you have them.	Body aches, headaches and pain are common and can be severe.
You may or may not feel tired and weak.	Tiredness and weakness are common.
There is no vaccine to protect you.	You can get vaccine to protect yourself.
Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.	The flu can result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.
Similarities Between Colds and the Flu	
WITH A COLD:	WITH THE FLU:
Caused by a virus.	Caused by a virus.
Affects the body's breathing system (nose, throat, windpipe and lungs).	Affects the body's breathing system (nose, throat, windpipe and lungs).
Usually goes away on its own.	Usually goes away on its own.
You should contact your doctor if symptoms change or get worse.	You should contact your doctor if symptoms change or get worse. There are antiviral medicines, by prescription, to treat the flu.



The Flu:

A Guide for Parents

Flu Information

What is the flu?

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by influenza viruses that are constantly changing. Flu causes illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year. Flu can be very dangerous for children. Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.

How serious is the flu?

Flu illness can vary from mild to severe. Flu can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age who have certain long term health conditions, including asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders (such as diabetes), and weakened immune systems due to disease or medication. Children with these conditions, and those receiving long-term aspirin therapy, can have more severe illness from the flu.

How does the flu spread?

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching something that

has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the symptoms of flu?

Symptoms of flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea. Some people with flu will not have a fever.

How long can a sick person spread the flu?

People with the flu may infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5-7 days after. Children and people with weakened immune systems can shed virus for longer, and might still be contagious past 7 days, especially if they still have symptoms.

IMPORTANT:

Can my child go to school, daycare or camp if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid giving the flu to other children or to caregivers.

When can my child go back to school after having the flu?

Keep your child home until at least 24 hours after their fever is gone, without using fever-reducing medications, like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil). A fever is defined as 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.

Protect Your Child

How can I protect my child against flu?

The first and most important thing to do is to get flu vaccine for your child, yourself, and everyone else in your household **every year**. Get the vaccine as soon as it is available.

- Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.
- It's especially important that young children and children with certain health conditions (see at left) get vaccinated.
- It's very important for parents, grandparents, teachers and caregivers to get vaccinated.
- Everyone caring for infants under 6 months (who are too young to be vaccinated) should be vaccinated if possible. Vaccinating pregnant women can offer some protection to the baby during pregnancy and after birth.



About Flu Vaccine

What are the benefits of the flu vaccine?

- Flu vaccine helps protect the person vaccinated from the flu.
- Flu vaccine can make your illness milder if you do get sick and reduces the risk of hospitalizations and deaths.
- Flu vaccine keeps you from spreading the flu to your family and friends. This is particularly important to protect those who are most vulnerable, such as:
 - » Those at greatest risk of getting seriously ill from flu, like older adults, people with chronic health conditions and young children.
 - » Infants younger than 6 months old who are too young to get vaccinated.

Is influenza vaccine effective?

Yes. While no vaccine is 100% effective, influenza vaccine is the best protection against getting the flu.

Influenza vaccine tends to be most effective in people who are younger and healthy. It takes about two weeks after vaccination to protect against flu, so vaccination does not protect immediately. Also, flu

viruses are always changing, so the vaccine needs to be updated every year, before flu season starts. When the vaccine isn't a good match with flu viruses that are circulating, it offers less protection.

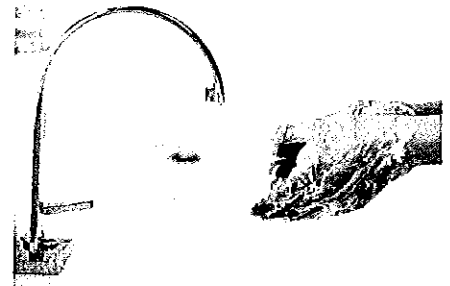
Are there any risks from flu vaccine?

Vaccine reactions, if they occur, are usually mild and can include soreness, redness and swelling where the shot is given. Some people have experienced fever, body aches, headache and fatigue. These reactions usually begin soon after the vaccine is given, and last 1-2 days.

A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause more serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of a vaccine causing serious harm is **extremely small**.

Life threatening allergic reactions from vaccines are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

More detailed information about flu vaccine is available at www.immunize.org/vis. At this site you will find Vaccine Information Statements about influenza vaccines designed to educate and inform in many languages.



Other Steps to Take

What else can I do to protect my child?

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available.
- Contact your healthcare provider if your child gets sick, especially if the child is very young (under 5) or has long-term health conditions.
- Seek emergency care if your child has trouble breathing, fast breathing, turns bluish or gray, has severe or persistent vomiting, has trouble waking up, or doesn't interact normally.

Much more information is available at:

www.mass.gov/flu
www.cdc.gov/flu
www.immunize.org

Or call (617) 983-6800 or your local board of health.



Adapted from CDC and developed as per legal requirements pursuant to An Act Relative to Annual Immunization Against Influenza for Children, MGL Chapter 111, Section 229, Amended 2012. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2016