

Influenza (Flu)

1. What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza, also called flu, is an illness caused by a virus (germ). Many people in the United States (U.S.) get the flu each year. Every year, between 5-10% of the U.S. population get the flu, and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from complications of this disease.

2. How does the flu spread?

Flu usually spreads from person-to-person through droplets from a sick person's cough or sneeze. It also can spread by touching a surface or an object that has flu virus on it, like a doorknob or computer keyboard, and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. The flu occurs mostly in the fall and winter months in the United States but can also spread into spring.

3. What are the symptoms of the flu?

There are many illnesses that feel like the flu. The symptoms of the flu usually come on suddenly and strong, and can include headache, fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, feeling weak or tired, and muscle or body aches. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults. People can have the flu and spread it to others 1-2 days before showing signs of illness.

4. Who is at greater risk for severe illness from the flu?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people). Serious problems related to the flu can happen at any age. Some people are at high risk for developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease)
- Children
- People who are overweight
- People with weakened immune system (such as cancer, HIV or AIDS)

5. How is the flu treated?

Prescription medicines from your doctor called antiviral drugs can treat the flu. If you are sick, these drugs can make you feel better faster and make the flu feel milder. Most people who get the flu will get better without these medicines. People who are more at risk for severe illness should check in with their doctor right away if they think they have the flu.

6. Where can I get vaccinated?

If you don't have health insurance or a doctor that offers flu vaccines, dial 2-1-1 or visit publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/influenza.htm for a list of low-cost immunization clinics. Vaccination locations can also be found through the Flu Vaccine Finder at www.flu.gov.



Key Points

- The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year.
- Many of the people who get very sick are older than 65 years, have a medical condition, or are younger than 5 years of age.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve. Stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading it to others.

For more information:

Los Angeles County
Department of Public Health

publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/influenza.htm

California Department of
Public Health

www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/Influenza.aspx

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)

www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm

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7. What can I do to protect myself and others from getting the flu?

The best way to prevent getting the flu is to get vaccinated every year. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated. During flu season, everyone who is around babies less than 6 months of age should get the flu vaccine in order to surround the baby with protection. Since flu viruses can change every year, the vaccine is updated annually to protect against the most common viruses. You should get a flu shot every year. You can stay healthy through the year by practicing these healthy habits:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay away from sick people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub if you don't have access to soap and water.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use medication the way your doctor recommends it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your arm when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage everyone who will be around a baby less than 6 months old to get a flu vaccine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the flu shot if you are pregnant.

8. Is the flu vaccine safe for pregnant women?

The flu vaccine is safe for pregnant women. The flu vaccine helps to protect pregnant women and their baby. Getting the vaccine while pregnant can help protect the developing baby from getting the flu for several months after birth. This is important because babies who are less than 6 months of age are too young to get a flu vaccine.