


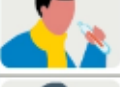


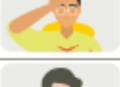


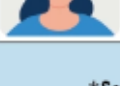


## Flu (Influenza)



The flu is a common respiratory illness you get from the influenza virus. Symptoms often include fever, head and body aches, coughing and a stuffy or runny nose. You're at risk for serious complications if you have an underlying health condition or are pregnant. Getting vaccinated every year is the best way to avoid getting sick with the flu.

## Covid-19 vs. Cold vs. Flu Symptoms

SYMPTOMS	COVID-19†	COLD	FLU
 <b>Sore throat</b>	Sometimes	Common	Common
 <b>Cough</b>	Common	Common	Common
 <b>Sneezing</b>	–	Common	Sometimes
 <b>Fever</b>	Common	–	Common
 <b>Body aches</b>	Sometimes	Sometimes (mild)	Common
 <b>Tiredness</b>	Sometimes	Sometimes (mild)	Common
 <b>Headache</b>	Sometimes	–	Common
 <b>Runny/stuffy nose</b>	Sometimes	Common	Sometimes
 <b>Shortness of breath</b>	Sometimes	–	Sometimes
 <b>Loss of taste and/or smell</b>	Sometimes	–	–

\*Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization

†Information on COVID-19, including its symptoms, is still emerging.

## **What is the flu (influenza)?**

The flu is an illness you get from the influenza virus. It causes symptoms like head and body aches, sore throat, fever and respiratory symptoms, which can be severe. Flu is most common in winter months, when many people can get sick at once (an epidemic).

## **When is flu season?**

Flu season — when cases of the flu go up dramatically — in the Northern Hemisphere is October through May. The highest number of cases (peak) usually happen between December and February.

## **How common is the flu?**

The flu is one of the most common infectious diseases.

## **What is the difference between flu and the common cold?**

The flu and the common cold can have similar symptoms, like runny nose and cough. But cold symptoms are usually mild and flu symptoms can be severe and lead to serious complications. Different viruses cause colds and the flu.

## **How do I know if I have flu or COVID-19?**

Since they have similar symptoms, the only way to know for sure if you have the flu or COVID-19 is to get tested. They both have a risk of serious illness. But different viruses cause these infections, and providers treat them with different medications.

## **Who is at higher risk for complications from the flu?**

Certain health conditions can put you at higher risk for severe illness from the flu. This includes life-threatening complications that require hospitalization. You're at higher risk for serious illness if you:

- Have asthma, COPD or another chronic lung disease.
- Have a history of kidney, liver, neurological, heart or blood vessels disease, including stroke.
- Have a condition that causes issues with muscle function or makes it difficult to cough, swallow or clear fluids from your airways.
- Have diabetes.

- Have a weakened immune system (from HIV/AIDS, cancer or immunosuppressive medications).
- Have a blood disorder, like sickle cell disease.
- Have a BMI greater than 30 (have obesity).
- Are under 5 years old or over 65 years old.
- Are pregnant.
- Are under 19 years old and take aspirin regularly.
- Live in a long-term care facility.

## **What are the symptoms of the flu?**

Symptoms of the flu usually come on quickly, and can include:

- Fever.
- Chills.
- Body aches.
- Cough.
- Headache.
- Sore throat.
- Runny or stuffy nose (congestion).
- Tiredness or feeling run down.
- Diarrhoea or vomiting (usually only in kids).

You may not have all of these symptoms.

## **What causes the flu?**

The influenza virus causes flu. Influenza A, B and C are the most common types that infect people. Influenza A and B are seasonal (most people get them in the winter) and have more severe symptoms. Influenza C doesn't cause severe symptoms and it's not seasonal — the number of cases stays about the same throughout the year. H1N1 ("swine flu") and bird flu are both subtypes of influenza A.

## **Is the flu contagious?**

Yes, the flu is contagious (it spreads from person to person). For every person infected, they spread the flu to one to two more people.

## **How does the flu spread?**

The influenza virus spreads from direct or indirect contact with someone else who's infected. Common ways to get the flu include:

- From someone nearby coughing, sneezing or talking. Droplets can either get onto your hands or move through the air to get into your nose or mouth. The flu then moves into your lungs.
- By touching a surface that's contaminated by the flu virus, then touching your face, nose, mouth or eyes. This includes things like doorknobs, desks, computers and phones.
- By touching the hands or face of someone who has the flu, then touching your face, nose, mouth or eyes.

## **How long after exposure will I get the flu?**

If infected, you'll usually get symptoms of the flu one to four days after exposure (incubation period).

## **How do I manage symptoms of the flu?**

Many people can manage the symptoms of flu at home with over the counter (OTC) medications and other therapies, including:

- Getting plenty of rest.
- Drinking fluids like water or broth to help prevent dehydration.
- Applying heat packs or hot water bottles can help with aching muscles.
- Taking pain killers lower your fever and relieve head and body aches.
- Using spray or oral decongestants like pseudoephedrine can help with a runny or stuffy nose.
- Taking cough suppressants (antitussives) like dextromethorphan can help calm a nagging cough.
- Using expectorants make it easier to clear mucus out of your lungs.

Not everyone should take certain OTCs, so check with your doctor before you use them. It's also a good idea to make sure certain medications are okay to use together or with supplements. Don't give aspirin to children under the age of 16 unless their Doctor says it's okay.

## **How can I prevent the flu?**

The best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine every year. Vaccines train your immune system to recognize infections and fight them off before you get sick. The influenza virus can change (mutate) a little bit every year, which is why you need to get vaccinated every year.

Even if you get sick with a different version of the flu than the one in the vaccine, vaccination reduces your risk of getting seriously ill.

Other ways to reduce your risk of getting the flu include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If you can't use soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough. Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue rather than your bare hand.
- Avoid being around other people when you or they are sick with the flu or other infectious diseases.
- Consider wearing a mask if you're sick and can't avoid being around others.
- Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose and mouth.
- Don't share food or eating utensils (forks, spoons, cups) with others.

## **What can I expect if I have the flu?**

Most people can manage flu symptoms at home and recover within a few days to a week. Because it can cause severe illness, it's important to keep an eye on your symptoms and get medical attention if you need it. This is especially important if you have an underlying health condition.

If you're sick with the flu, you should avoid being around others, except to seek medical care.

## **How long does the flu last?**

Flu can last from a few days to two weeks. Symptoms like fever and body aches can come on suddenly but usually go away faster than other symptoms. A cough or runny nose can last longer.

## **How long is the flu contagious?**

You can be contagious with the flu from a day before your symptoms start to up to a week after. You're most contagious for three to four days after your symptoms start. People with weakened immune systems and infants may be contagious for longer.

## **When can I go back to work?**

To avoid spreading the flu to others, you shouldn't go back to work or school until it's been at least 24 hours since you've had a fever (without taking fever-reducing medications). Your employer or school may have different requirements for returning.

## **Complications**

The flu virus itself can cause complications or it can weaken your immune system and allow bacteria to infect different parts of your body (secondary infection). Complications and secondary infections include:

- Ear infections.
- Sinus infections.
- Severe lung infection (pneumonia).
- Pregnancy loss (miscarriage).

## **When should I see my doctor?**

- You have flu symptoms and an underlying condition that puts you at higher risk for severe illness.
- Your symptoms don't start to improve after seven to 10 days or if you have a fever lasting longer than three days.
- You're pregnant and have a fever or other flu symptoms.

## **When should I go to A&E?**

Seek immediate medical attention if you have symptoms of severe illness, including:

- High fever (over 103 F/40 C).
- Difficulty breathing.
- Not peeing or peeing very little.
- Pain in your chest or stomach (abdomen) that doesn't go away.
- Persistent dizziness.
- Confusion.
- Severe muscle pain or weakness.
- Seizures.
- Bluish skin, lips or nails (cyanosis, which can be a sign of low oxygen levels in your blood or tissues).
- Fever or cough that gets better or goes away but then get worse.
- Worsening of other health conditions.

## **Is the stomach flu influenza?**

No, gastroenteritis, commonly called "stomach flu," isn't caused by the influenza virus. It's not related to the seasonal flu.