



Influenza (flu) Frequently Asked Questions (As of September 9, 2010)



How does the flu spread?

Flu viruses mainly spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people who have the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something such as a surface or object with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth, eyes or nose.

What are the signs and symptoms of the flu virus in people?

The symptoms of flu virus in most people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may have the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

How severe is illness associated with the flu virus?

Illness with the flu can range from mild to severe. Most people who get sick due to influenza recover from their mild illness without needing medical treatment. However, some people do experience more severe symptoms which can result in hospitalization and sometimes death.

Prevention & Treatment

What can I do to protect myself and others from getting sick?

Simple everyday precautions can help prevent the spread of germs that cause illnesses like the flu.

- Get vaccinated with the flu vaccine.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol concentration.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, it is recommended that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. Keep away from others as much as possible to keep from spreading illness. Similarly, if your children are ill with fever and cough, keep them home from school until at least 24 hours after the fever is gone.

What is the best way to wash my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. You should wash your hands with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers may be used with at least 60% alcohol concentration.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you are mildly sick with flu-like illness, it is generally recommended that you stay home, rest, drink plenty of fluids, and perhaps take medication such as Tylenol or ibuprofen (not aspirin) to relieve your fever. Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from spreading illness. Staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings, to prevent spreading the illness to others.

If you have severe illness or you are at high risk for flu complications, contact your health care provider or seek medical care.

Those who are at higher risk for complications from influenza include:

- Women who are pregnant during the influenza season
- People 50 years and older
- Infants and young children (through 4 years of age)
- Residents of nursing homes or long term care facilities
- American Indians/Native Alaskans
- People with underlying medical conditions
 - Chronic lung disease including asthma
 - Heart disease (except high blood pressure)
 - Liver disease
 - Kidney disease
 - Nervous system disease
 - Blood system disease
 - Diabetes and other metabolic disorders
 - Morbid obesity (body mass index 40 or more)
 - Under 18 and receiving daily aspirin therapy

If you become severely ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek **emergency** medical care:

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Vaccine Information

Who should get the flu vaccine?

This year the CDC is recommending **universal immunization** against the flu for everyone 6 months of age and older. It is highly recommended that all healthcare workers should receive the influenza vaccine. Those at higher risk for complications from influenza (see above), their household members or caregivers, and other in close contact with such individuals (such as healthcare workers) are again especially urged to receive the flu vaccine.

The flu viruses are always changing, so people that got the 2009 H1N1 vaccine or who had the flu in 2009 should still get the 2010-2011 seasonal flu vaccine.

Will children need more than one dose of the flu vaccine?

Some children will need two doses of the seasonal flu vaccine to be protected against getting the flu, based on their vaccination history. Children ages 6 months-8 years need two doses of 2010-2011 seasonal vaccine if they have not had at least one dose of pandemic 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine and at least two doses of a previous seasonal influenza vaccine. Contact your healthcare provider or vaccine administrator for further details.

When should I get the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine can be given throughout the flu season, but for the best protection against getting the flu, get vaccinated early. It takes about 2 weeks to develop protection against influenza after receiving the vaccine, though the protection lasts about a year. Waiting to get the vaccine until later in the flu season is not necessary to extend protection throughout the winter. Serologic studies show that antibody levels are maintained well throughout the influenza season.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine also protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu?

Yes, this year's seasonal flu vaccine will protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu. This year's seasonal trivalent vaccine will contain the pandemic 2009 H1N1 virus as its H1N1 component. The influenza B component is the same as that in last year's seasonal influenza vaccine, while the H3N2 component is new this year.

When and where will the seasonal flu vaccine be available?

The flu vaccine has started being shipped to providers. For questions on vaccine availability, contact your health care provider or visit <http://www.flu.gov/>

How safe is the seasonal flu vaccine? Are there any side effects?

The seasonal influenza vaccines have an excellent safety record. The most common side effects of flu vaccination are "local" reactions like soreness, redness and swelling at the site, as well as headache, fever, muscle aches and perhaps vomiting. Those who receive the nasal spray form of the vaccine may experience a runny nose or sore throat. There have been concerns about the flu vaccine causing Guillain Barre Syndrome (a paralyzing illness that usually heals itself). During the 1976 flu season there was an additional one case in 100,000 people receiving influenza vaccine; most flu seasons the risk for Guillain Barre Syndrome after a flu shot is one additional case in 1 million people receiving influenza vaccine. The risk of getting Guillain Barre Syndrome after having influenza ILLNESS is much greater than this.

Severe allergic reactions, while rare, may occur and include:

- difficulty breathing
- swelling around the eyes or lips
- hives
- hoarseness
- wheezing
- a rapid heart rate
- dizziness

If any of these symptoms occur seek medical attention right away. The safety of vaccines is always being monitored

For more information, see *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, August 6, 2010.
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5908.pdf>