

# Influenza: Facts About The Flu

*...for the health and well-being of you and your family.*

*Each season is unique, but each year, anywhere from 5 to 20 percent of the U.S. population gets the flu. Around 200,000 people are hospitalized due to its complications, and another 36,000 die from it. Yet, some myths still remain about its origination and transmission. It is important to be correctly informed about the disease in order to remain healthy during the miserable flu season.*

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**The flu is an infection of the respiratory tract caused by the influenza virus. It is transmitted mainly through the air, such as when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The flu virus is present in every region in the United States, and is not just a “cold weather” disease.**

### **Symptoms of the Flu**

Many times, flu symptoms can be confused with a common cold. The most common signs of the flu include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Extreme fatigue
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Stomach ailments such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (can occur in adults, but is most common in children)

### **If Bitten by the Flu Bug**

If, despite your best efforts, you do find yourself knocked down by the flu, it is important to take good care of yourself. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following:

- Stay home from work! It's your best chance for recovery, and you will avoid spreading the disease to others.
- Get lots of sleep.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Take over-the-counter (OTC) medications appropriate for your ailments.
- Consult your doctor early on to follow the best course of treatment.

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## Prevention

It is possible for serious complications to arise from the flu, including bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. This is why it is crucial to do all you can to prevent the virus from attacking you in the first place.

The CDC states that three simple steps should be taken in order to avoid the flu:

- 1) **Get a flu vaccine.** It is the first and most important step in protecting against the disease.
- 2) **Take preventive actions** – cover your mouth when you sneeze, and wash your hands often, especially if you are in the presence of people that may be infected. Hand sanitizers are just as effective if you can't get to the sink.
- 3) **Take antiviral drugs** if your doctor recommends them. These are prescription drugs that fight the flu by keeping the viruses from reproducing in your body.

## Facts about Flu Shots

Yearly flu vaccination is recommended by the CDC for children ages 5-18. Vaccination should take place in September or as soon as the vaccine is available. Those in groups known as "high risk" should also receive a yearly flu shot. Those groups include children, pregnant women, people ages 50 and older, those who live in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities, and those who live with or care for those at high risk for the flu, such as health care workers.

Contrary to popular belief, you cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine – but sometimes side effects mimic those of the flu, such as a headache, low fever, and/or runny nose. These will only persist for a day or less, however.

Those who should NOT get a flu shot are people with a severe allergy to eggs, those who have had severe reactions to flu shots in the past, and people who previously developed Guillaine-Barre Syndrome in the first 6 weeks after getting a flu shot.

## Emergency Situations

Sometimes with the flu come some unexpected medical emergencies. It is important to be aware of the warning signs in order to receive effective treatment.

In children, emergency warning signs include:

- Fast breathing (or trouble breathing)
- Skin color with a blue tint
- Serious dehydration
- Not waking up or interacting
- Being so irritable the child does not want to be touched
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs are:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

It is important to seek medical care immediately if someone suffering from the flu is experiencing any of those signs.