

Influenza (Flu)

What is influenza (flu)?

The flu is a respiratory disease caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. Illness is usually mild or moderate, not requiring hospitalization. However, at times flu can be severe, even leading to death. It is not the same as the “stomach flu.”

What are the symptoms?

Flu symptoms include fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, and body aches. These symptoms usually begin suddenly and might be severe enough to stop your daily activities.

Should I get a flu vaccine?

Yes. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get flu vaccine every year. Getting a flu vaccine helps protect you from getting the flu and prevents you from passing it to people who could get very sick.

Who is most at risk for getting very sick from flu?

- People age 65 and older
- Young children, especially those under 2 years old
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease
- American Indian and Alaska Natives

Although these groups are at highest risk, anyone can become very sick with flu.

How is the flu different from a cold?

Colds are generally less serious than the flu. With a cold, you’re more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose, while the flu causes body aches, fever, and extreme tiredness. A person with a cold can usually do their normal activities, but someone with the flu can’t. Flu can result in serious health problems like pneumonia, bacterial infections, and hospitalization.

Can I get the flu from the flu vaccine?

No. Some people get a mild fever or have discomfort for a short time after being vaccinated, but this is a sign that your body is responding to the vaccine. It is not the flu. Also, because there are many viruses circulating in the fall, it is possible to get sick with a different virus around the same time they get flu vaccine.

When should I get vaccinated?

For best protection, flu vaccine is usually given in early fall before flu season starts. But you can get it anytime during flu season which is typically October through April.

Do children need one or two doses of flu vaccine?

It depends on the child’s age and whether they got flu vaccine in the past. If your child is 6 months through 8 years old, he or she may need two doses at least four weeks apart. Ask your doctor or clinic.

What type of flu vaccine should I get?

There are several types of flu vaccine available. The type of vaccine you can get depends on things like your age, health conditions, or if you're pregnant. Your health care provider will know what type of vaccine you should get. The most important thing is to get vaccinated.

- **Trivalent vaccine** – This is the traditional flu shot that protects against three strains (or types) of flu: two A strains and one B strain.
- **Quadrivalent vaccine** - This vaccine protects against four strains (or types) of flu: two A strains and two B strains. This vaccine's effectiveness will depend on whether two B strains of flu are circulating during the flu season.
- **High-dose vaccine** - This vaccine is approved for persons 65 and older and contains four times the amount of vaccine protein of the traditional vaccine. This vaccine produces a stronger immune response in people 65 and older.
- **DNA technology (RIV) and cell-based flu vaccines** – These vaccines are not made using chicken eggs like traditional flu vaccines. These vaccines may not be as widely available as traditional flu vaccines.
- **Flu vaccine with adjuvant** – This vaccine is approved for persons 65 and older. It is a trivalent vaccine that contains an adjuvant, which is a substance added to the vaccine to help create a stronger immune response.

Flu vaccine and allergies

People with an egg allergy can safely get a flu vaccine. Life-threatening allergic reactions to flu vaccine are very rare. Talk to your health care provider if you've had a life-threatening reaction to a flu vaccine.

What can I do to protect myself and others?

- Get vaccinated.
- Avoid being around others who are sick.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or an alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer.
- Protect infants by not exposing them to large crowds or sick family members when flu is in your community.
- Do not share drinking cups and straws.
- Clean commonly touched surfaces often (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, and water faucets).

What if I think I have the flu?

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- If you are in a high-risk group, call your health care provider for advice.
- Go to the doctor or the emergency room if you are having these symptoms:
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Sudden dizziness
 - Confusion
 - Severe or persistent vomiting
 - Flu-like symptoms that improve, but return with worse fever and cough

What about antiviral medicines?

Antiviral medicines can offer some protection if you have been exposed to flu. Contact your health care provider right away if you get sick with the flu and are at high-risk for complications from flu.

Immunization Program
 PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
 651-201-5503 or 1-800-657-3970
www.mdhflu.com