



FACT SHEET

What to Do If You Get Sick with Flu

Flu Symptoms

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

Symptoms of flu include:

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

While getting a flu vaccine each year is the best way to protect against flu, **influenza antiviral drugs** can fight against influenza, offering a second line of defense against the flu.

Antiviral Drugs

Antiviral drugs are an important second line of defense in the prevention and treatment of flu.

- Antiviral drugs are important in the treatment and prevention influenza.
- Influenza antiviral drugs can be used to treat the flu or to prevent infection with flu viruses.
- Treatment with antivirals should begin within 48 hours of getting sick, and can reduce your symptoms and shorten the time you are sick.
- When used for prevention, antivirals are 70% to 90% effective in preventing infection with influenza viruses.
- Antiviral drugs are effective across all age and risk groups.

Two antiviral drugs (oseltamivir, brand name Tamiflu®, and zanamivir, brand name Relenza®) are approved for treatment of the flu.

- Oseltamivir is approved to treat flu in people one year of age and older.
- Zanamivir is approved to treat flu in people 7 years and older.
- These are prescription medications, and a doctor should be consulted before the drugs are used.
- Antiviral treatment lasts for 5 days and **should be started within 2 days of illness**, so if you get flu-like symptoms, seek medical care early on.

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If You Get Sick

Most healthy people recover from the flu without complications.

If you get the flu:

- Stay home,
- Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- There are over-the-counter (OTC) medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever).
- Remember that serious illness from the flu is more likely in certain groups of people including people 65 and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions and young children.
- Consult your doctor early on for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention.

Emergency Warning Signs

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

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- 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
- Fever with a rash

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

Seek medical care immediately (call your doctor or go to an emergency room) if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs above. When you arrive, tell the reception staff that you think you have the flu. You may be asked to wear a mask and/or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu,
or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6358 (TTY).

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