

The Flu

The flu is an illness caused by a virus. Like a cold, it attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. The flu can sometimes lead to other problems like pneumonia, ear and sinus problems, dehydration, and worsening of asthma. For most of us, the flu will go away in 1 to 2 weeks.

How can I catch the flu?

- The flu is easily passed from person to person by coughing and sneezing.
- A person can also get the flu by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What are the signs of the flu?

- Fever
- Cough
- Tiredness
- Sore throat
- Headache and muscle ache
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Throwing up or diarrhea (more common in children)

Who is most at risk for getting the flu?

Everyone is at risk for getting the flu, but for some people the flu can cause serious illness. Those most at risk include:

- Older adults (over age 65).
- Pregnant women.
- Very young children.
- Adults and children (6 months and older) who have heart or lung disease, including asthma.

- Adults and children (6 months and older) who have diabetes, kidney, or blood problems.
- People with HIV/AIDS, cancer, or any condition that makes it harder to fight off disease.
- Children and teens (6 months to 18 years) who take aspirin for a long time.
- People who live in nursing homes and other health care facilities.
- Workers in hospitals or clinics who are around lots of people who have the flu. These people should contact their doctor or clinic if they have flu-like symptoms.

What can I do to keep from getting the flu?

There is no way to make sure that you won't get the flu. But there are some steps you can take to lower your chances:

- Get a flu shot or spray every year in the fall before flu season starts.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Ask your doctor or clinic about other drugs that can keep you from getting the flu.

What kind of vaccine can I get? There are two kinds:

- The "flu shot" is made from a dead flu virus and is given as a shot, usually in the arm. The flu shot can be used in people older than 6 months of age.



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- The nasal spray flu vaccine is made from a live flu virus and is given through the nose. It can be used in healthy people between the ages of 5 to 49 years.
- People who are allergic to eggs or who have had a reaction to the flu shot or vaccine should not be given the flu shot or nasal flu spray. Also, talk to your doctor if you have a history of Guillain-Barre' syndrome.

How well does the flu shot work?

- The shot prevents the flu in 70% to 90% of young, healthy adults.
- The shot doesn't do as well at preventing flu in older adults and people with certain medical problems. But the shot does reduce the number of these people who die or need a hospital stay because of the flu.

How well does nasal spray vaccine work?

- This new vaccine can lower your chances of getting the flu. Children 5 to 8 years old need two doses at least 6 weeks apart in their first year of getting the FluMist, and people ages 9 to 49 need one dose.
- FluMist should not be given to people with asthma or other lung diseases. Children under the age of 5 should not get the spray.

Are there drugs to treat the flu? Yes, there are a number of products that may help you feel better:

- Prescription medicines can lessen your symptoms or the time you are sick with the

flu. Your doctor or clinic will help you decide whether these drugs are right for you.

- Over-the-counter medicines can help with flu symptoms such as sore throat, stuffy nose, cough, fever, and body aches. However:
 - Never give aspirin to children or teens who might have the flu. It can cause serious problems or even death. Call your doctor or clinic first.
 - If you already take prescription medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist which flu medicines you can use safely. For example, some over-the-counter flu products have medicines to treat a stuffy nose (decongestants), which can raise your blood pressure or even make your blood pressure medicines less effective.
 - No medicine can take the place of the flu vaccine.
- Many other diseases can feel like the flu, but they need different treatments. Always go to your doctor or clinic if you feel worse.

What should I do if I get the flu?

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink lots of water or other liquids like juice and soup.
- Don't spread your germs! Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, wash your hands often, and STAY HOME!
- Don't smoke or drink alcohol.

FDA Office of Women's Health <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

To Learn More:

FDA Center for Drug Evaluation and Research

Phone: 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332)

<http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/antivirals/influenza/default.htm>