

INFLUENZA

FLU is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu is most prevalent from fall to late spring. Symptoms of the common cold and influenza are similar, but influenza symptoms are more severe.

People sick with flu may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

Fever/chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headache, fatigue, and vomiting or diarrhea.

Flu complications:

Some people will develop complications from flu, especially those who have chronic medical problems such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease. Sinus and ear infections may occur. Shortness of breath and hypoxia may indicate pneumonia requiring patients to see their doctor or go to the emergency department. These symptoms may be caused by the flu virus or by a co-infection of the flu virus and bacterial infection. In some cases, flu requires hospitalization and can be fatal.

Emergency symptoms of flu – contact your doctor or visit the emergency department for:

- shortness of breath
- pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- sudden dizziness, weakness, profound fatigue
- confusion
- severe or persistent vomiting
- flu-like symptoms that improve then return with severe cough and fever

While sick with flu like symptoms:

- Limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, without use of fever-reducing medicines, except to get medical care
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, throw the tissue in the trash and be sure to wash your hands
- Wash your hands often with soap and water - only use an alcohol-based hand rub when soap and water are not available
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth to avoid spreading germs
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated

Treatment:

Antiviral drugs, like Tamiflu, when taken within 48 hours of symptoms may reduce the severity of illness and sometimes shorten the time you are sick. Starting them later may still be beneficial, especially if the sick person is at high risk for complications. There is no evidence that natural products are useful against the flu. In some cases, antibiotics are prescribed to treat possible secondary bacterial infections.

Prevention:

The first and most important step in flu prevention is to get a flu vaccine each year. Everyone six months and older should get the vaccine by the end of October, especially those 65 and older because they are at high risk for developing complications from flu. Vaccination should continue throughout the flu season, even in January or later, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preventive actions such as staying away from people who are sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and frequent hand washing are important steps in preventing flu.