

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT INFLUENZA

In the Clinic
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What Is Influenza?

Influenza (“the flu”) is a viral illness that can cause serious health problems, including hospitalization and death. It is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes near you. It affects people of all ages, and symptoms may be hard to differentiate from those of other illnesses, including COVID-19. It is usually spread during the winter months but can be spread all year long.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

- Sudden-onset high fever
- Cough
- Feeling tired and weak
- Muscle pain and soreness
- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Runny nose
- Headache

How Is It Diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms. This is usually enough to diagnose the flu; however, in some cases, you may need a physical examination or tests. Testing may be necessary to distinguish the flu from other illnesses, such as COVID-19, because symptoms can be similar.

Can It Cause Health Complications?

Usually, the flu is not serious, and you will start to feel better after 3-5 days and recover fully within 1-2 weeks. However, in some persons, it can cause serious complications resulting in hospitalization or even death. You are at higher risk for complications if you:

- Are aged 65 years or older
- Are pregnant
- Live in a nursing home
- Are an American Indian or Alaska Native
- Have certain health problems, including lung disease, heart disease, kidney or liver disorders, obesity, or a weakened immune system

How Is It Treated?

The flu is usually treated with rest, drinking clear fluids, and managing your fevers and aches with over-the-counter medicines like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. You should not take aspirin. If you are at risk for complications or have worsening symptoms, your doctor may prescribe medicines called antivirals to help your body fight the virus. These work best when started within 2 days of symptoms but may work if started later.

Should I Get a Flu Shot?

Everyone aged 6 months or older should get a flu shot each year, preferably in the fall (September or October in the Northern Hemisphere). If you



miss your fall shot, you should try to get vaccinated in the winter. Different vaccines are available; ask your doctor which is best for you. If you have severe allergies to eggs, you may get a flu shot, but you should be watched by a health care provider afterward to make sure you do not have an allergic reaction.

What Are the Side Effects of the Flu Shot?

The flu shot does not give you the flu. Side effects are usually minimal and limited to soreness at the injection site for 1-2 days. Occasionally, people have low-grade fever and muscle aches for 1-2 days after the shot, but this is less common. More serious side effects are rare.

Can I Receive the Flu Vaccine and the COVID-19 Vaccine at the Same Time?

The flu vaccine and other vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine, may be given during the same visit.

How Can I Prevent Spreading the Flu?

- If you think you have the flu, stay home from work or school.
- Use a facemask or tissue to cover your mouth and nose when coughing.
- Wash your hands often.
- Stay away from others until your fever is gone and your cough is better.

Questions for My Doctor

- What is the best way to protect myself from the flu?
- What are the side effects of the flu shot?
- Can I get a flu shot and other vaccines at the same time?
- Do I need to be evaluated in the office, or can you diagnose me over the phone or video?
- Do I need additional testing to confirm that I have the flu and not COVID-19?
- Are antiviral treatments likely to speed my recovery?
- Is it possible to get COVID-19 and the flu at the same time?
- How long will my symptoms last?
- How long will I be contagious?

For More Information



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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/keyfacts.htm

MedlinePlus
<https://medlineplus.gov/flu.html>