

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT INFLUENZA

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## What Is Influenza?

Influenza is a virus that makes you feel sick and can cause serious health problems. It's often called "the flu." The flu is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes close to you. It is usually spread during the winter or cooler months but can be spread all year long.

## What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

- High fever
- Feeling tired and weak
- Feeling sore and achy
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Headache

## How Is It Diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you questions about your symptoms. This is generally all the information your doctor needs to diagnose the flu; however, in some cases, you may need a physical examination or tests.

## Can It Cause Health Complications?

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

- Aged 65 years and older
- Pregnant
- Living in a nursing home
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Obese

You are also at higher risk if you have certain health problems. These include:

- Lung disease
- Heart disease
- Weakened immune system

## How Is It Treated?

Your doctor may prescribe antiviral treatment for the flu. All of the following are ways to feel better:

- Rest.



- Stay hydrated by drinking lots of clear fluids.
- Use over-the-counter medicines, like acetaminophen or ibuprofen, to help bring your fever down. These medicines can also help aches.
- Avoid taking aspirin.

If you are at risk for complications, your doctor may prescribe medicines called antivirals that help your body fight the flu virus. They may work best if they are started within 2 days of getting flu symptoms, but may still be helpful if they are started after that time.

## Should I Get a Flu Shot?

Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu shot, preferably by the end of October each year. There are different types of vaccines available. Ask your health care provider 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 afterwards to make sure you do not develop a bad reaction. You should not get the flu shot if you ever had a serious allergic reaction to it in the past.

## 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.

## For More Information



**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>  
**World Health Organization**  
[www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/)