

What Should I Do If I Get the Flu?

Go to bed!

Other steps you can take:

- **See your health care provider.** Other illnesses can mimic the flu, but may need different treatment. There are anti-viral drugs that can be used to treat flu if taken within 72 hours after symptoms start.
- **Drink lots of clear fluids** (water, juice, 7-Up®).
- **Take aspirin, ibuprofen or acetaminophen** to reduce pain and fever. (Aspirin may cause problems in some people.)
- **A cool sponge bath** may relieve the fever. Don't use rubbing alcohol—it makes symptoms worse.
- **For a cough**, inhale warm steam or try an over-the-counter cough suppressant.
- **For sore throat:** gargle with salt water (1/4 teaspoon salt per cup water); suck on ice cubes or lozenges; put a cold pack against your throat; drink hot water with lemon and honey.
- **Don't smoke!** Flu causes swelling and irritation in your lungs and windpipe. Smoking makes this worse.

Can Flu Be Prevented?

You can minimize your chances of getting the flu.

- **Get a yearly flu vaccine.**
- **Wash your hands often.** Flu is spread through the air by coughing or sneezing. It may also spread by hand contact.
- **Keep in good health.** Eat healthy food, exercise, and get enough rest. This makes you less susceptible to illnesses.
- **Don't smoke!** Smoking makes your respiratory tract more prone to infections.

If you didn't get a flu shot and you're exposed to the flu, see your provider. You may be able to take medicine to keep from getting it.

Flu and Children

If you're caring for a child with flu, talk to your health care provider about safe medications for pain or fever.

A rare but serious illness—Reyes syndrome—is linked to use of aspirin and some other analgesics by children under age 16 with flu or chickenpox.

Call Your Health Care Provider if...

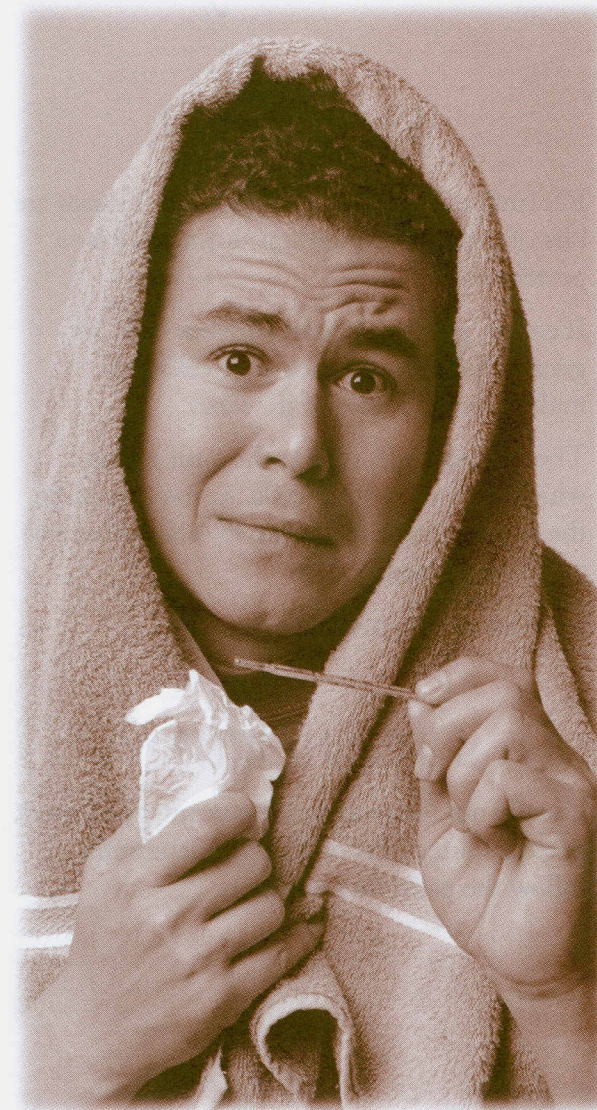
You have:

- **Shaking chills.**
- **High fever** that lasts more than 3–5 days.
- **Symptoms that don't get better** after 7 days, or get worse again after getting better.
- **Severe headache**, especially if associated with fever or neck stiffness.
- **Dark urine.**
- **Severe muscle pain** or tenderness.
- **Wheezing** or other difficulty breathing beyond a typical cough or stuffiness.

This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care.
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HELP ON THE WAY

Flu



What do whales, ducks, seals, horses, pigs and humans have in common?

They can all catch the flu.

What Is the Flu?

Flu (influenza) is caused by a virus. Viruses are bits of genetic information surrounded by a protein shell.

If a virus gets inside some of your cells, its genetic instructions trick your cells into making many copies of the virus.

The infected cells release the virus copies, which then infect new cells. In the case of flu, the viruses infect the lining of tubes that carry air to your lungs.

In other words, you feel lousy.

Is the Flu Dangerous?

Usually not. But in a small percentage of cases, bacterial infections or serious pneumonia follow the usual flu symptoms.

How Do I Know If I Have It?

Sometimes a bad cold can be mistaken for the flu. Usually the flu causes less stuffy nose and mucus than a typical cold.

Flu symptoms include:

- muscle aches
- fever and chills
- headache
- dry cough
- weakness

The worst symptoms generally last only a few days. The feeling of exhaustion may last longer.

In the U.S. more than
69 million
work/school days are lost
due to flu every year.

What About Flu Shots?

The Flu Vaccine

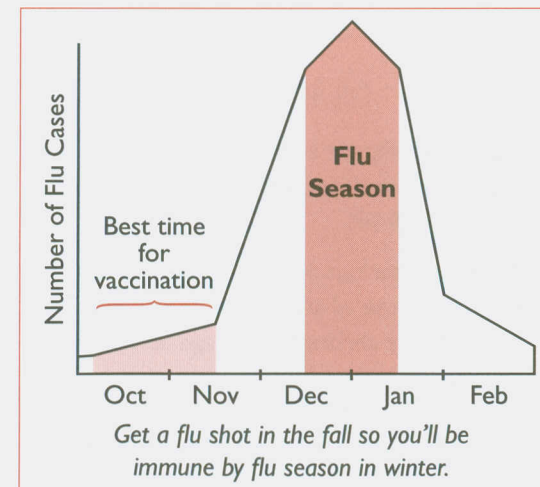
There is an effective vaccine for the flu. It reduces the chance of getting flu by about 75%. But you need to get one every year.

With most vaccines, only one or a few shots are needed for life-long protection. The vaccine causes your body to make antibodies that attack and kill the virus.

But the flu virus is different. There are 3 types—influenza A, B and C (which is quite rare)—and many strains of each type.

Influenza A in particular mutates often. It changes its outer protein shell, so it can't be recognized or attacked by the antibodies for the old one.

So a new flu vaccine has to be created every year. It contains the killed or weakened strains of influenza A and B that are most common that year.



Should I Get One?

Yearly flu shots are recommended for most adults age 50 or older and for people with:

- chronic lung disease, such as asthma or emphysema
- diabetes
- chronic heart or kidney disease, or anemia
- depressed immune systems
- jobs that put them at risk, such as health care workers

Even if you're not at high risk, you may want to get a flu shot to avoid the loss of work or school time flu causes.

Flu shots have few side effects. But always talk to your health care provider about any vaccination, especially if you have allergies, other health problems, are pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends the flu vaccine for **anyone** who wishes to reduce the chances of getting the flu.