



The Flu

What is the flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. Virus types include A, B, and C. Types A and B normally cause seasonal outbreaks every year typically beginning in October and ending in May.

What are the symptoms?

Flu symptoms start 1-4 days after exposure. Symptoms usually start suddenly with high fever (>100 degrees), muscle aches, headache, dry cough, runny nose, sore throat, and weakness. Many people are so ill that they cannot get out of bed for 1-3 days. Fever can last for 5 days, and the cough and fatigue often persist for 2-3 weeks. Flu symptoms are much more severe than a cold. Most people remember when they have had the flu because of the severity of the symptoms.

Lack of appetite is another symptom. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are also possible. (*The term "stomach flu" is often used inaccurately; that term refers to gastrointestinal viruses, not influenza.*) The very young, the very old, and those with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes and heart problems, are at the greatest risk for serious complications.

(CDC) guidance indicates that people with influenza-like illness (ILI) should stay home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone (without the use of fever-reducing medicine). A fever is defined as having a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit or 37.8° Celsius or greater.

How is flu spread?

The influenza virus is very contagious and is spread by respiratory droplets containing the virus from sneezing, coughing and hand contact. Most healthy people can spread the flu 1 day before getting symptoms and up to 5-7 days after being ill.

How can I prevent getting the flu?

- **Get an annual flu vaccine.** It takes 2 weeks after the vaccination ("the flu shot") to develop immunity. The flu shot does not give you the flu, but you can get low grade fever and/or bodyaches from your immune system being stimulated.

- **Frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizers.** Wash hands with soap and water, rubbing for 20 seconds, dry and use the towel to turn off faucet and open door. Carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, such as Purell®; and use it often.
- **Get enough sleep and avoid alcohol.** Refrain from being in crowds or in situations where you have close contact with people.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.** Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. discard tissue and wash hands. Discard soiled tissues frequently. Empty your trash, wipe down your personal space (desk, phone, remote, key board, mouse, bathroom sink, door knobs and light switch plates) with Lysol® or Clorox® Wipes during your illness and for 5-7 days after; your roommate and friends will appreciate this!

How is flu diagnosed?

The flu is usually diagnosed by the sudden onset and type of symptoms you have. Although other infections can cause similar symptoms, the majority of the time if you have sudden onset of fever, body aches, headache, and dry cough during flu season, you have the flu.

The flu swab is a nasal swab offered at SHC that can help in the diagnosis, but it is not necessary in every case. There is a cost and the test should be done within the first 3-4 days of illness. The test is not 100% accurate. False negatives can occur: you can still have the flu and have a negative flu swab test. Your provider will help you decide if this test might be helpful.

How is the flu treated?

Antibiotics have no effect on the flu.

- Rest is important. Your immune system requires more rest to kill this aggressive virus.
- Drink plenty of fluids is important to prevent dehydration from fever and coughing.
- Some medications that can help relieve symptoms include:
 1. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Paracetamol®), and ibuprofen. Take only the recommended dose found on the bottle label. If you take multiple over the counter medications with each one containing acetaminophen, you can easily exceed the maximum daily dose and cause liver damage. Only take 1

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medicine at a time containing acetaminophen.

2. For high fevers, alternating acetaminophen with ibuprofen every 3 hours can help. Do not alternate naproxyn (Aleve®) with ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®).
3. Sudafed® and Mucinex® for runny nose/congestion
4. Afrin® nasal spray-use only for 3 –4 days
5. Saline nasal sprays; and sinus rinses/Neti pot offers temporary relief
6. Over the counter cough syrups, such as Delsym®
7. Throat lozenges
8. Medicinal balms such as Vicks Vaporub®
9. Salt water gargles
10. Megadosing of vitamins, Airborne® and other supplements have not been proven to be effective in preventing or treating the flu.

What are antiviral medications and when are they prescribed?

Antiviral drugs decrease the ability of flu viruses to reproduce, can shorten the time you are sick by 1 day and make you less contagious to other people. The medicine must be started within 2 days of becoming sick. Antiviral medications are not usually indicated for healthy young people, are expensive and can cause side effects (headache, nausea and dizziness). Antivirals are usually prescribed for people with chronic diseases such as asthma and diabetes, and for the very young or elderly. A Schiffert Health provider will help you decide if the medication is indicated.

When Should I See a Health Care Provider?

- Fever over 100 degrees for more than 5 days OR fever over 103 degrees that cannot be reduced by fever-reducer medications.
- Chest pain, wheezing, or shortness of breath, difficulty breathing in the lungs (versus nasal congestion)
- Headache, stiff neck, or rash
- History of heart/lung/kidney disease or diabetes
- Persistent cough for 7-10 days
- Severe facial pain
- Symptoms have not shown improvement within 7-10 days
- Symptoms that get worse after you have started to feel better
- Concern for basic function (eating/drinking, sleeping, caring for self)

You can learn more about influenza at:

www.cdc.gov/flu