

When to Get Medical Help for Flu Symptoms

What are the symptoms of influenza?

You may have influenza (flu) if you have some or all of these symptoms:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- very tired
- sometimes diarrhea and vomiting (most common in young children or the elderly)

What should I do if I get sick?

Most people are sick with the flu for 3-5 days and get better on their own. People without high-risk conditions that aren't very sick usually don't need to seek medical help, but should:

- Stay home. Avoid contact with other people as much as you can to keep from spreading your illness to others.
- Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Wash your hands often – with soap and water, or a hand sanitizer.

- If necessary, take medicine to reduce fever.
- Watch for symptoms of more serious illness. (see below)

Call your health care provider if you or a family member has symptoms you are concerned about, such as a very high fever.

Seek medical care for people at high-risk

Some people are at high risk of getting very sick from flu. The following people should call their health care provider as soon as symptoms of flu develop:

- Is pregnant or within the last two weeks of delivery
- Is a child under 2 years of age
- Has neurologic or neuromuscular disorder, asthma or chronic lung diseases like COPD or cystic fibrosis, heart disease (except high blood pressure), liver or kidney disease, a blood disorder (such as sickle cell disease), metabolic or endocrine disorders (such as diabetes), severely obese, weakened immune system due to disease or medicines (including HIV/AIDS, cancer chemotherapy, on long term steroids, or anti-rejection drugs for transplants)
- Is 65 or older

Health care providers will determine whether flu testing and possible treatment are needed. Your health care provider may prescribe antiviral drugs that can treat the flu. These drugs work better when they are started soon after symptoms develop.

Get medical help immediately for these symptoms

Infants and Children

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not urinating or no tears when crying
- Severe or repeated vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Pain or pressure in chest or belly
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Flu-like symptoms that get better but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

Adults

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or belly
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or repeated vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that get better but then return with fever and worse cough
- Severe dehydration

Who should take antiviral drugs?

Most healthy people who get the flu do not need antiviral drug treatment.

It's very important that antiviral drugs be used early to treat people who are very sick with the flu (for example people who are in the hospital)

and those with high-risk factors that increase their chance of serious complications from the flu.

When should I go to the emergency room?

If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk of flu complications or you are concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice. You should only go to the emergency room if you need to seek immediate medical care.

How long should I stay home if I'm sick?

Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)

Don't wait to get sick.

Vaccination increases your odds of preventing the flu – get vaccinated!

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