



# All about the flu and how to fight it

## What is Flu?

It's that time again - the dreaded "flu season"! But there is a lot you can do to protect yourself and others against it, as well as to look after yourself should you be one of the unlucky ones. The true "flu" - influenza, not to be confused with "stomach flu" - is quite a bit worse than a common cold and will make you miserable and keep you home for a few days, but most people will make it through without complications. However it is important to know if you are at risk for more severe disease, and to look out for warning signs. Read more below, and be well!

## Signs and Symptoms of Flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms that usually start suddenly, not gradually:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in young children than in adults.

## How Flu Spreads

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, talk, or perhaps breathe. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

## Period of Contagiousness

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Although people with the flu are most contagious in the first 3-4 days of their illness, some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

## What should I do if I get sick?

Most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. If, however, you have symptoms of flu and are in a high risk group, or are very sick or worried about your illness, contact your health care provider (doctor, physician assistant, etc.). Antiviral medications can lessen the severity of the illness and prevent complications if started within the first 48 hours of symptoms.

### ***If you experience any of the following warning signs, seek urgent medical care:***

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Significant dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Fever lasting for more than three days, or greater than 104 degrees (40 C) not responding to fever-reducing medications

## How to help yourself feel better until you recover:

- Most importantly, STAY HOME and get plenty of rest to give your body a chance to recover, and to avoid exposing others. Listen to your body: sleep as much as you need, don't smoke or drink alcohol, and HYDRATE enough to keep your urine clear or light yellow - you get dehydrated very quickly when you have a fever.
- For fever, muscle aches, sore throat, or headache you can take ibuprofen (like Motrin or Advil) three 200 mg pills with food every 8 hours. If fever is still high, you can add acetaminophen (like Tylenol) – 650 mg every 4-6 hours, up to a maximum of 3000 mg in 24 hours. This will help a lot! It may be helpful to alternate ibuprofen and Tylenol. Please follow directions, do not exceed recommended dosages, and seek advice if fever >100F continues for more than three days.
- Cough: cough medicine you buy over the counter with dextromethorphan may help, but hot tea with honey is at least as good, breathing in steam is very soothing, and cough lozenges with ingredients like honey or menthol can help to keep the cough under control during the day especially if you have to be alert. If the cough is really bothersome and keeps you awake at night, prescription cough medicine will help.

## Preventing Seasonal Flu

The flu shot is recommended for almost everyone over the age of 6 months. During influenza season, Tang holds periodic flu clinics open to the community; in addition, students can schedule flu shots in Specialty Clinic online or can receive them in Primary Care during routine appointments, just by asking.

There are other everyday actions you can do to help prevent the spread of germs that cause illnesses like the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands afterward.
- Most importantly, wash your hands with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. The virus spreads from coughing the virus out into the air and from touching surfaces with your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to reduce the spread of germs.

**For up-to-date information on how to access flu vaccines at UHS see: [uhs.berkeley.edu/flushots](https://uhs.berkeley.edu/flushots)**

**For more information, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/index.html>**