

Be Aware of Common Flu Symptoms

The flu usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- High fever
- Headache
- Tiredness/weakness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Body or muscle aches
- Diarrhea and vomiting also can occur, but are more common in children.

These symptoms are usually referred to as "flu-like symptoms." A lot of different illnesses, including the common cold, can have similar symptoms.

What You Should Do If You Get the Flu

- Rest
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- Take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu

A virus causes influenza, so antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work to cure it. Remember, most healthy people recover from the flu without complications.

Look Out for Emergency Warning Signs

There are some "emergency warning signs" that require urgent medical attention.

In children, some emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- High or prolonged fever
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Changes in mental status, such as not waking up or not interacting; being so irritable that the child does not want to be held; or seizures
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions (for example, heart or lung disease, diabetes)

In adults, some emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- High or prolonged fever
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Near fainting or fainting
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Seek medical care immediately, either by calling your doctor or going to an emergency room, if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs described above or other unusually severe symptoms. When you arrive, tell the receptionist, or nurse about your symptoms. You may be asked to wear a mask and/or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick.

Some people are at increased risk to develop complications of flu

This group includes:

- People 65 years of age and older
- Children 6-23 months of age - increased risk for influenza-related hospitalization.
- People of any age with chronic medical conditions (for example, heart or lung disease, diabetes)

- Pregnant women

If you are in a group that is considered to be at high risk for complications from the flu and you get flu-like symptoms, you should consult your health-care provider when your symptoms begin.

Preventing the Flu

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine. New flu vaccine supplies purchased by the CDC from Aventis Pasteur will be arriving in January. Healthy persons aged 5–49 years should be encouraged to be vaccinated with a nasal-spray flu-vaccine [<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine.htm>], such as FluMist [<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/12/031209081457.htm>], which uses a live, but attenuated influenza virus.

In the absence of vaccine, however, there are other ways to protect against flu.

Other Good Health Habits

- **Avoid close contact** - Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **Stay home when you are sick** - If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** - Cover your mouth and nose with a **tissue** when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Clean your hands** - Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth** - Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

The information presented in this Flu Update is consistent with that found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Flu Home Site [<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>] and other reputable sites such as the World Health Organization [<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/2003/fs211/en/index.html>]. The material provided is for informational purposes only and any recommendations are not intended to replace the advice of your physician. You are encouraged to seek advice from a competent medical professional regarding the applicability of any recommendations with regard to your symptoms or condition.

George R. Gebus, MD, MPH
US Department of Energy
Office of Occupational Health, EH-53/270CC
19901 Germantown Road
Germantown, MD 20874-1290
Phone: 301-903-2876
Fax: 301-903-5072
Email: george.gebus@eh.doe.gov