

# Flu-Proof Yourself

## Learn the basics of flu prevention

Nights are getting cooler and leaves are beginning to turn. Before you know it, flu season will be here. No one can say whether the 2017-2018 flu season will be a mild or severe one. In any case, you need to protect yourself.

Some people think seasonal flu is a minor illness. Yet every year, millions of people get sick, hundreds of thousands go to the hospital and thousands die from flu. Read on to learn how you can avoid getting the flu bug this year.

## What is influenza?

Influenza or flu is a respiratory illness caused by an influenza virus. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever\* or chills
- Severe fatigue
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

*\* It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

## How flu spreads

Flu is contagious. People with flu can spread it to others up to six feet away. When a person with flu coughs, sneezes or simply talks, nearly invisible droplets spread the virus. The virus-bearing droplets can land in the mouth or nose of a person nearby. They might also be inhaled into the lungs.

## Be prepared

The first and best defense against flu is to get an annual flu vaccine. The vaccine protects against three or four strains of flu virus. The selection of the virus strains may vary from year to year. The decision for which specific virus strains to include is based on which strains were circulating during the previous flu season. The CDC and World Health Organization (WHO) collaborate on the choice. Timing is critical because it takes six months to produce large quantities of the vaccine.



Getting an annual flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and your family from the flu. The CDC recommends flu vaccine for everyone 6 months old or older. Vaccination reduces your risk of getting the flu and of complications from the flu. The more people who get vaccinated, the more people will be protected from flu.

## Who is most at risk?

Older people, very young children, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions are more vulnerable to flu and its complications. Anyone can get the flu. Being healthy and in your twenties or thirties is not a guarantee that you won't get sick.

## How do I protect my family?

Encourage loved ones to get a flu shot. Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for flu complications. Their close contacts — family, friends and caregivers — should get a flu shot as well.

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### Who should not get a flu vaccine?

The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older receive an annual flu vaccination with rare exceptions. People who can't get the flu shot include:

- Infants younger than 6 months
- Anyone with severe allergies to flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine. This might include gelatin, antibiotics or other ingredients

People who should talk to their health care provider before getting a flu shot include:

- People with an allergy to the vaccine.
- Anyone who has had Guillain-Barré syndrome.
- Anyone who is not feeling well.

### Stop the spread of germs!

In addition to getting vaccinated, the CDC recommends that you and your family take preventive steps to avoid getting and spreading the virus.

- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school.

### Practice good health habits

The healthy habits that help protect your health as you age will help protect you in flu season.

- Get plenty of sleep.
- Be physically active, if you are able.
- Manage your stress.
- Stay well hydrated.
- Eat nutritious food.

### Can I get vaccinated and still get the flu?

Yes. It's possible to get sick with the flu even if you have been vaccinated. This is possible for the following reasons:

- It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the protection to set in. You may be exposed to a flu virus shortly before getting vaccinated or during the two weeks afterward. This exposure may make you ill with flu before the vaccine begins to protect you.
- You may be exposed to a flu virus that was not included in the current year's vaccine. There are many different flu viruses that circulate every year. The flu vaccine is made to protect against the three or four flu viruses that research suggests will be most common.

### Summary

The annual flu shot is the best way to reduce the chances you will get flu and spread it to others. When more people get vaccinated, less flu can spread through the community. Encourage your loved ones to get vaccinated when the vaccine becomes available. Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk for flu complications. Everyday preventive steps may also keep you and your family healthy.

### Sources

Take 3 Actions to Fight the Flu

[https://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/three-actions-fight-flu.htm?s\\_cid=NCIRD-FLU-HP-009](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/three-actions-fight-flu.htm?s_cid=NCIRD-FLU-HP-009)

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Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine

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Vaccination: Who Should Do It, Who Should Not and Who Should Take Precautions

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CDC: Reported Flu Deaths in Children Surpass 100 for 2016-17

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This handout contains general health and wellness information and is not a substitute for your doctor's care. You should consult an appropriate health care professional for your specific needs. Some treatments mentioned may not be covered by your health plan. Please refer to your benefit plan documents for information about coverage.