

# INFLUENZA

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FROM VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

**What is influenza (also called flu)?** The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

## How flu spreads

Experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. 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, eyes or possibly their nose.

## 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. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

## People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever\* or feeling feverish/chills
- Muscle or body aches
- Cough
- Headaches
- Sore throat, runny or stuffy nose
- Fatigue

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.*

## CDC Says "Take 3" Actions To Fight The Flu

- **CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.** There are many different flu viruses. The flu vaccine protects against the three viruses that research suggests will be most common.
- **Take everyday preventive action** - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- **Antiviral drugs can treat your illness.** Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics. They are prescription medicines and are not available over-the-counter. Antiviral drugs can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick and may also prevent serious flu complications.



## What are the symptoms of the flu versus the symptoms of a cold?

- In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds are generally much milder and do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations
- It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other infections on the basis of symptoms alone. A doctor's exam may be needed to tell whether you have developed the flu or a complication of the flu. There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long as you are tested within the first 2 or 3 days of illness.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about your illness, especially if you are at high risk for complications of the flu, you should consult your health care provider.

