

Seasonal Influenza (Flu)

Information Sheet for General Public

What is seasonal influenza (flu)?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. Seasonal flu is caused by two types of flu viruses that normally circulate in humans: type A and B. These viruses infect the nose, throat, and sometimes lungs. Infection with a flu virus can cause mild to severe illness and could even lead to death. Anyone can get sick from the flu, although certain people are at greater risk for serious complications. Those most at risk include children under 5, pregnant people, adults 65 or older, and people of any age with chronic health conditions. It is most common during the fall and winter, from October to February, although it is possible to get the flu at other times of the year.

What are the symptoms of seasonal flu?

Signs and symptoms of the flu may include:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Vomiting or diarrhea

*Not everyone with the flu will have a fever and some people never develop any symptoms.

How does seasonal flu spread?

Seasonal flu spreads from people infected with the flu virus to the healthy people around them through small droplets when they cough, sneeze, or even talk. Healthy people can catch the flu if they are within 6 feet of an infected person. Although this is less common, a person may also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus on it, then touching their own eyes, nose, or mouth.

Can seasonal flu be prevented?

The best way to protect against the flu is to receive a flu vaccine every year.

You can also protect yourself and others from the flu virus by:

- Avoiding close, or limiting, contact with people who are sick.
- Staying home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medications, or after symptoms have improved.
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough and throwing away used tissues in a trash can.

Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology

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- Washing your hands often with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub when soap and water are not available.
- Avoiding touching your eyes and mouth.
- Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that may be contaminated with flu viruses.

Who should get vaccinated?

Everyone six months and older should receive a flu vaccine every season with rare exceptions. Vaccines are especially important for people who are at greater risk of serious complications from the flu. There are flu vaccines that are approved for specific age groups. Talk to your healthcare provider about which flu vaccine is recommended for you.

I do not have insurance. How can I get my flu vaccine?

The Vaccines for Children Program (VFC) through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health's West Virginia Division of Immunization Services provides free vaccines to eligible children. Eligible children are those who do not have health insurance, are enrolled in Medicaid, are American Indian or Alaskan natives, and/or those with health insurance that does not cover some or all vaccines. Children with insurance through Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) are also eligible for free vaccines at VFC program locations. There are over 400 VFC healthcare providers across the state including all county health departments. You can find local VFC locations through your local health department or [CDC Vaccines for Children Program](#). Adults may be eligible for free influenza vaccines at their county health departments.

What should I do if I get the flu?

Most people with the flu have mild symptoms and do not need medical care or antiviral medication. If you get sick with flu symptoms, stay home and avoid contact with other people until you are fever free for at least 24 hours without taking fever-reducing medicines, except if you need medical care or other necessities. If you are worried about your illness, contact your healthcare provider. If you are at higher risk for complications and have symptoms of the flu, contact your healthcare provider as soon as possible. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people at higher risk for complications take antiviral medications as early as possible since these medicines work the best if they are started within two days after symptoms began.

When should I get emergency medical care?

Don't wait! Seek medical care right away for any of the emergency warning signs listed below.

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In children:	In adults:
Breathing that is fast or difficult	Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
Bluish lips or face	Severe weakness or unsteadiness
Chest pain	Persistent pain or pressure in the chest/abdomen
Severe muscle pain	Severe muscle pain
Seizures	Seizures
Fever/cough that improves then worsens/returns	Fever/cough that improves then worsens/returns
Worsening of chronic medical conditions	Worsening of chronic medical conditions
Dehydration	Not urinating
Not alert or interacting when awake	Persistent dizziness, confusion, inability to wake
Ribs pulling in with each breath	
Fever of 104°F or greater	
Any fever in a child under 12 weeks	

How is seasonal flu treated?

Flu antiviral drugs are prescription medications that can be used to treat flu illness. Prompt treatment is recommended for people who have or are suspected to have the flu and are at greater risk for serious complications. Flu antivirals work best when given within two days after getting sick, but should be started as soon as possible after developing symptoms. Antivirals may reduce the severity and duration of a person’s illness with the flu. It can also prevent other serious complications from the flu when treatment is started early.

For more information about seasonal flu and vaccinations, visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/index.html>.

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