

Flu Information - Adult Population

What is the "flu" (Influenza)?

The flu is a common and highly contagious respiratory infection that affects the nose, throat and lungs. It is caused by a virus. Immunization helps strengthen your body's natural immune response against the flu. The flu shot stimulates your immune system to build antibodies against the virus, making it stronger and ready to fight off the flu.

How does the flu spread?

The flu virus spreads droplets from person to person when coughing, sneezing, or talking. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. A person may also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus on it and then touching their own eyes, mouth, or nose. Viruses can live on your hands for up to five minutes and they can live on hard surfaces that you touch with your hands - like countertops, doorknobs and telephones - for up to two days.

How long can a person spread the flu to others?

The flu virus can be spread to others from 1 day before getting sick to about 5-7 days after getting sick. This can be longer in some people, especially children and people with a weakened immune system. This means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

fever* (not everyone with the flu will have a fever) cough sore throat runny or stuffy nose
body aches headache chills fatigue sometimes vomiting and diarrhea

What is the difference between the cold and the flu?

The common cold and flu symptoms are often very similar. Use this chart below to help you determine if what you have is a simple cold or the flu.

Symptom	Cold	Influenza
Fever	Rare	Usual; high fever (102 ° F/39 ° C - 104 ° F, 40 ° C), sudden onset, lasts 3 to 4 days.
Headache	Rare	Usual; can be severe
Muscle aches and pains	Sometimes, generally mild	Usual; often severe
Tiredness and weakness	Sometimes, generally mild	Usual; severe, may last up to 2 to 3 weeks
Extreme tiredness	Unusual	Usual; early onset, can be severe
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Common
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Common
Chest discomfort, coughing	Sometimes, mild to moderate	Usual, can become severe.
Complications	Can lead to sinus congestion or infection, and ear aches.*	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure, and become life-threatening. Can worsen a chronic condition.

Is the flu a serious illness?

The flu is a serious contagious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes death. (The flu can lead to 1,000 hospitalizations and approximately 300 deaths in Ontario annually). Certain people are at greater risk for severe illness including older adults, young children, women who are pregnant, and people with certain long term health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick with the flu?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends three steps to fighting the flu:

1. vaccination
2. everyday preventive actions, and
3. the correct use of antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them.

STEP 1 - A flu vaccine is the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.

- The flu vaccine protects against the viruses that research indicates will be most common.
- It takes about 2 weeks after getting the flu shot to develop protection against the flu for up to 1 year.
- Everyone 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated against the flu each year.
- High risk persons should get vaccinated to decrease the risk of severe flu illnesses.

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- Health care professionals, parents with children under 6 months, and those who care for or live with high risk persons should get vaccinated to keep from spreading the flu.
- The flu vaccine *does not* contain live viruses so you can't get the flu from the vaccine.

STEP 2 - Take everyday actions to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses.

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you have flu-like symptoms, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- 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 for 15 seconds or more. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

STEP 3 - Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.

- If you get the flu, antiviral drugs can treat your illness. These drugs can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick.
- Antiviral drugs work best when started in the first 2 days of symptoms to treat people who are sick.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with flu symptoms you should stay home, get plenty of rest and avoid contact with other people except to seek medical care. Most people are able to recover at home from flu without medical care. Continue to cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

Most people recover from the flu in about a week. To ease the symptoms of flu:

- drink lots of fluids;
- avoid drinks with caffeine;
- take basic pain or fever relievers;
- do not give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) to children or teenagers under the age of 18;
- apply heat for short periods of time using a hot water bottle or heating pad to reduce muscle pain;
- take a warm bath;
- gargle with a glass of warm water or suck on hard candy or lozenges;
- use saline drops or spray for a stuffy nose; and
- avoid alcohol and tobacco.

When should I seek medical care?

Most cases of the flu tend to be mild. However, if you do not start to feel better after a few days or if your symptoms get worse, you should either call your health care provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

You should call your health care provider *immediately* if you experience flu symptoms and you:

- are pregnant;
- have heart or lung disease;
- have any other chronic health problem that requires regular medical attention;
- live in a remote or isolated community;
- are elderly or frail; or
- have an illness or are receiving treatments – for example, for diabetes, cancer, or HIV/AIDS – that might affect your immune system.

If you are in one of the groups above and develop flu-like symptoms, you are at greater risk of serious flu-related complications.

There are emergency warning signs that should signal anyone to seek medical care urgently.

Emergency Warning Signs In Adults:

Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath

Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen

Sudden dizziness

Confusion

Severe or persistent vomiting

Get your flu shot today. Early immunization is the most effective way of preventing the flu