

How to Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones from Respiratory Diseases this Winter

These actions help keep you and your family safe from respiratory illnesses, including flu, COVID-19 and RSV.

- Get vaccinated if possible. Vaccines for flu and COVID-19 are your best defense against respiratory illnesses
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home and stay safe if you are sick
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or elbow
- Consider wearing a mask in indoor or crowded places
- Wash your hands regularly. Use soap and water. If there is no soap available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that may be contaminated with viruses
- Take antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them

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Vaccines to Consider

Influenza (Flu)

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Flu and Flu Vaccine

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and some people, such as people 65 years and older, young children and people with certain health conditions, are at higher risk of serious flu complications. The best way to prevent the flu and reduce the risk of its potentially serious complications is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

Flu Symptoms

Flu can cause mild to severe illness and, at times, can lead to death. Flu symptoms usually come on suddenly. People who have flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults

How Flu Spreads

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of nearby people. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching a surface or object that has the flu virus and then touching their mouth, nose or possibly their eyes.

References:

- CDC.gov/Flu/Index.html
- DOH.WA.gov/You-And-Your-Family/Illness-And-Disease-Z/Flu

Recognize the Emergency Warning Signs of Respiratory Illness

Call 911 when you see:

- Severe trouble breathing (struggling for each breath, can barely speak or cry)
- Passed out or has stopped breathing
- Lips or face are bluish when they are not coughing
- There may be a life-threatening emergency

Get medical help right away for infants when they:

- Have a fever over 100.4F for infants younger than 3 months, or
- Fever for more than 24 hours if older than 3 months
- Have fast or labored breathing
- Look very ill or is unusually drowsy or difficult to console
- Have significantly fewer wet diapers than normal

Children should go to the ER when they:

- Have fast or labored breathing
- Are not able to drink enough fluids
- Have very decreased alertness and activity
- Have a fever for more than 72 hours, or their temperature repeatedly rises above 104F

Adults should go to the ER with any of these:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Confusion
- Worsening fever and cough, especially with pink or bloody mucus



Flu Vaccine

Flu vaccines protect against the three influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.

There are different flu vaccine manufacturers and multiple flu vaccines that are licensed and recommended for use in the United States. If you have questions about which vaccine is best for you, talk to your doctor or other health care professional.

The most important thing is for everyone 6 months and older to get a flu vaccine yearly.

Flu Vaccine Cost

Adults:

- Medicare Part B covers flu vaccines at no cost.
- Most insurers cover the annual flu vaccine as preventive care often at no cost to the insured.
- Free and low-cost flu vaccines may be available from local health centers and state health departments for those who qualify.

Children:

All children can access all recommended vaccines, including flu, COVID-19 and RSV, for free through their family's insurance or the Vaccines for Children Program.