

About Flu

Frequently Asked Questions



Cook County DEPT. of
Public Health
A division of Cook County Health

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About Flu

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Influenza A and B viruses routinely spread in people between October and March every year.

The flu is not the same as a cold!

A cold is usually mild. You may feel stuffy, sore throat or sneezy, but you can still go about your day. The flu is more serious and comes on suddenly. It can make you feel very tired, with fever and body aches. It can also lead to more serious illness, hospitalization or even death.

Who is at risk?

Older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions are at higher risk of serious flu complications. The flu virus causes millions of illnesses and thousands of deaths in the U.S. annually.

How flu spreads

The flu virus is spread by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. People may spread flu to others before realizing they are sick or when sick with symptoms.

When are people most contagious?

People are most contagious during the first three days of their illness. Some otherwise healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick.

How is flu prevented?

The single most important step in preventing flu is to get a flu vaccine each year. The flu vaccine is safe and effective. Learn more about flu myths and facts at [cookcountypublichealth.org](https://www.cookcountypublichealth.org).

Who should get a flu shot ?

Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu shot (unless a doctor says it is not safe). It is extra important for:

- Babies and young children
- Adults ages 65 and older
- Pregnant people
- People with long-term health problems (like heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes)
- People who live with or care for someone at high risk

Protect yourself and others against flu.
Find a flu clinic near you. Scan the QR code at right.

WALK-INS WELCOME • NO APPOINTMENT NEEDED • FREE TO EVERYONE
REGARDLESS OF INSURANCE • AGES 6 MONTHS & OLDER

**CHECK THE
SCHEDULE**



Symptoms

Flu symptoms usually come on suddenly. People who have flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- fever* or feeling feverish
- chills
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches

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



Treating the Flu



Medicine may help.

- Some special flu medicines (like Tamiflu) may make you feel better, faster.
- They work best when taken within two days of getting sick.



Stay home if sick.

- Rest and sleep.
- Drink lots of water or soup.
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen to help with fever and body aches.
- Stay away from others to avoid spreading flu germs.



Call your healthcare provider or go to urgent care or ER if you:

- Have trouble breathing
- Have chest pain
- Get very weak or dizzy
- Cannot keep fluids down
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.