

WHAT IS THE FLU?

Influenza (“the flu”) is a viral illness that spreads easily and affects your respiratory system (lungs, nose, air way). The flu is caused by different types of viruses called influenza A and influenza B. In the United States, the number of people with flu usually starts increasing in the fall, with the highest number in the winter. You can monitor flu activity in Pennsylvania using the Department of Health’s respiratory virus dashboard, found [here](#).

FLU SYMPTOMS

You might get sick one to five days after being exposed to someone with the flu. Symptoms start within 48 hours of exposure for most people. Symptoms like fever, dry cough, sore throat, tiredness, headache, stuffy or runny nose, and muscle or body aches can last three to seven days. Not everyone gets all these symptoms or a fever.

HOW FLU SPREADS

You can catch the flu from someone else who has the flu. Less often, a person might get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. People who have the flu but have no symptoms can still spread it. People with the flu can spread it one day before and for five to seven days after feeling sick. People with the flu are most contagious in the first three to four days after the symptoms begin.

WHO GETS THE FLU?

Anyone can get the flu, and it can be serious at any age. Kids often get it at schools or daycares. Anyone can develop complications, like pneumonia, but this is most common in older people and people with chronic health problems. Each year, the flu is unpredictable and capable of causing thousands of hospitalizations and hundreds of deaths in Pennsylvania.

PREVENTING THE FLU

The best way to prevent the flu and its complications is to get the flu vaccine every year as soon as it is available. This protects you and others. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to be fully effective, so it is important to get it before the flu season begins. However, you can still get the flu vaccine anytime during the flu season. The vaccine can be taken at the same time as other vaccines, like for COVID-19 or RSV.

There are two types: 1) a shot with a needle, and 2) a nasal spray. Everyone 6 months and older should get a vaccine every year. It is especially important for people at high risk for serious problems as well as for those living or working with high-risk people. Flu viruses change over time, and new strains can emerge each year. This is why you need to get the vaccine every year.

You can also help prevent flu by covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, washing hands often, avoiding sick people, staying home when sick, and not touching your face.

More information is at [CDC's website] (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>)

FLU COMPLICATIONS

Older people, people with other health issues, pregnant people, and young kids, are more likely to develop additional problems like pneumonia, bronchitis, and other infections. People with chronic medical conditions like asthma, heart disease, diabetes and other conditions can get very sick. Flu can also make those medical conditions worse.

DIAGNOSING FLU

Health care providers can swab your nose or throat and test for flu. It is important to get tested so that you can get the proper treatment.

FLU TREATMENT

Rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medications can help with flu symptoms. Antibiotics do not work because flu is caused by a virus. Antiviral medications from a doctor may be used, if indicated. Stay home until no fever for 24 hours.

*Never give aspirin to a child or teenager without first speaking to a doctor.

ANTIVIRAL MEDICATIONS

Antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu (generic name: oseltamivir), Relenza (generic name: zanamivir), Xofluza (generic name: baloxavir marboxil), and Rapivab (trade name: peramivir), are prescribed medications specifically designed to treat influenza infections. Your healthcare provider may recommend these prescription medications for the treatment of flu infections if they are deemed appropriate. The antivirals work best when started within two days of being sick. Call or go see your doctor if you think you have the flu to see if an antiviral medication would be helpful. Antiviral treatment can still help after two days of symptoms starting if a person has risk factors that might develop into serious flu complications, or if they have been admitted to the hospital for flu.

RESOURCES

[Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) - [Search for flu vaccine locations](#)

[Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) - [Search for COVID-19 vaccine locations](#)

[What You Should Know About Flu Antiviral Drugs | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/antiviral-drugs/)[Test2treat.org](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/antiviral-drugs/) - [Home test to treatment program for flu and COVID-19](#) To enroll without a smartphone, call 1-800-682-2829