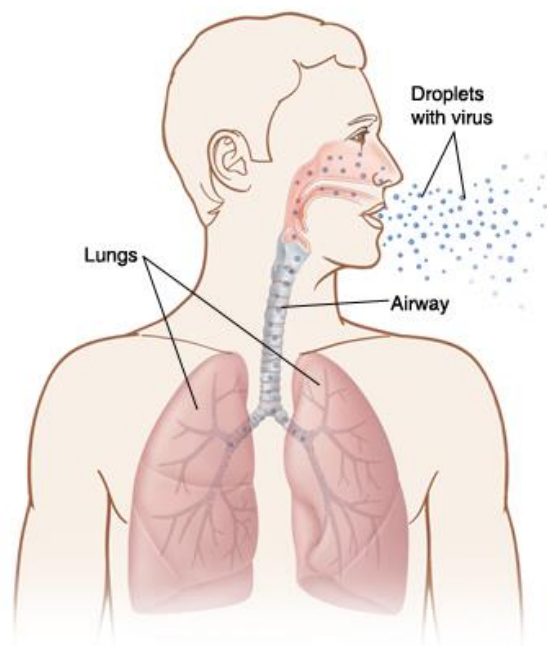


# Influenza

Influenza (“the flu”) is an infection that affects your respiratory tract (the mouth, nose, and lungs, and the passages between them). Unlike a cold, the flu can make you very ill. And it can lead to pneumonia, a serious lung infection.

## What Are the Risk Factors for the Flu?



**Viruses that cause influenza spread through the air in droplets when someone who has the flu coughs, sneezes, laughs, or talks.**

Anyone can get the flu. But you’re more likely to become infected if you:

- Have a weakened immune system.
- People with a chronic illness, such as diabetes or heart, kidney, or lung disease
- Work in a health care setting where you may be exposed to flu germs.
- Live or work with someone who has the flu.
- Haven’t received an annual flu shot.

## How Does the Flu Spread?

The flu is caused by viruses. The viruses spread through the air in droplets when someone who has the flu coughs, sneezes, laughs, or talks. You can become infected when you inhale these viruses directly. You can also become infected when you touch a surface on which the droplets have landed and then transfer the germs to your eyes, nose, or mouth. Touching used tissues, or sharing utensils, drinking glasses, or a toothbrush with an infected person can expose you to flu viruses, too.

## What Are the Symptoms of the Flu?

Flu symptoms tend to come on quickly and may last a few days to a few weeks. They include:

- Fever usually higher than 101°F (38.3°C) and chills
- Sore throat and headache
- Dry cough
- Runny nose
- Tiredness and weakness
- Muscle aches

## How Is the Flu Treated?

Influenza usually improves after 7 days or so. In some cases, your health care provider may prescribe an antiviral medication. This may help you get well sooner. For the medication to help, you need to take it as soon as possible (ideally within 48 hours) after your symptoms start. If you develop pneumonia or other serious illness, hospital care may be needed.

## Easing Flu Symptoms

- Drink lots of fluids such as water, juice, and warm soup.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Ask your health care provider what to take for fever and pain.
- Call your provider if your fever rises over 101°F (38.3°C) or you become dizzy, lightheaded, or short of breath.

## Taking Steps to Protect Others

- Wash your hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing. Or, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand cleaner containing at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue. Then throw the tissue away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough and sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- Stay home until at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or chills. Be sure the fever isn't being hidden by fever-reducing medication.
- Don't share food, utensils, drinking glasses, or a toothbrush with others.
- Ask your health care provider if others in your household should receive antiviral medication to help them avoid infection.

## How Can the Flu Be Prevented?

- **One of the best ways to avoid the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year.** Viruses that cause the flu change from year to year. For that reason, doctors recommend getting the flu vaccine each year, as soon as it's available in your area. The vaccine may be given as a shot or as a nasal spray. Your health care provider can tell you which vaccine is right for you. The flu vaccine usually is available in the September thru December.
- Wash your hands often. Frequent handwashing is a proven way to help prevent infection.
- Carry an alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60 percent alcohol. Use it when you don't have access to soap and water. Then wash your hands as soon as you can.
- At home and work, clean phones, computer keyboards, and toys often with disinfectant wipes.
- If possible, avoid close contact with others who have the flu or symptoms of the flu.