

Taking Care of Yourself: What to Do if You Get Sick with Flu

Flu Symptoms

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

Symptoms of flu include:

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

While getting a flu vaccine each year is the best way to protect against flu, influenza antiviral drugs can fight against influenza, offering a second line of defense against the flu.

If You Get Sick

Most healthy people recover from the flu without complications. If you get the flu:

- Stay home from work or school.
- Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- There are over-the-counter (OTC) medications to relieve the symptoms of the flu (but never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever).
- Remember that serious illness from the flu is more likely in certain groups of people including people 65 and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions and young children.

Consult your doctor early on for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention.

Antiviral Drugs

Antiviral drugs are an important second line of defense against the flu.

- If you do get the flu, antiviral drugs are an important treatment option. (They are not a substitute for vaccination.)
- Antiviral drugs are *prescription medicines* (pills, liquid or an inhaler) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body.
- Antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. This could be especially important for people at high risk.

- For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started soon after getting sick (within 2 days of symptoms).
- There are four flu antiviral drugs approved for use in the United States. CDC has issued [interim guidance](#) on which antiviral drugs to use during the 2008-09 flu season: The four antiviral drugs are:
 - [Oseltamivir](#) (brand name Tamiflu[®])
 - [Zanamivir](#) (brand name Relenza[®])
 - [Amantadine](#) (Symmetrel[®], generic)
 - [Rimantadine](#) (Flumadine[®], generic)

Antiviral drugs differ in terms of who can take them, how they are given, their dose (which can vary depending on a person's age or medical conditions), and side effects.

Emergency Warning Signs

Seek emergency medical care if you or someone you know is having any of following warning signs discussed below.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Seek emergency medical care if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs above.

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