



What is the Flu?

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The flu refers to an infection with the influenza virus. Every year, usually during late fall and early spring, the influenza virus circulates in the United States. It starts as a respiratory infection but can cause serious complications, especially if you are elderly or have other medical conditions.

How do I get the flu?

The flu is spread by being in close contact with an infected person when they sneeze or cough. A person can begin to spread the flu 1 day before they even know they are sick. You can also get the virus from touching a contaminated surface and then touching your nose, mouth, or eyes. The virus can live on some surfaces for up to 48 hours.

What symptoms are common with the flu?

The most common symptoms of the flu are fever, cough, sore throat, and runny nose. Some people experience nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, and others complain of muscle aches.

How do I know if I have the flu or just a cold?

There are many respiratory viruses, other than influenza, around during the flu season and they cause some of the same respiratory symptoms as the flu. The common cold usually does not cause nausea or vomiting and muscle aches are also not usual. Finally, a person with the flu can feel very tired, more so than with a common cold.

Is there a test for the flu?

Yes, there are tests that can be performed to confirm influenza infection. They usually involve taking a swab inside your nose or deep in your throat. Some tests give results in a few minutes; others can take a day or more.

Can the flu be treated?

Taking care of yourself when you have the flu is very important. Most people recover with no problems but there can be complications from the flu. Drinking plenty of fluids (water) and getting plenty of rest are important if you have the flu. Non-prescription Acetaminophen can help with pain or fever. Also, there are 4 antiviral medicines, available by prescription from your healthcare provider, to treat influenza. They are baloxavir, oseltamivir, peramivir, and zanamivir. These medicines work best when taken within the first 48 hours of the flu symptoms.

Can the flu be prevented?

Getting vaccinated every year with the flu vaccine is the best way to prevent the flu. It is recommended that everyone 6 months of age and older receive the flu vaccine. You should also be sure to wash your hands with soap and water regularly, minimize contact with those who are already infected, avoid touching your face, cover your coughs and sneezes, stay home when you are not feeling well, and clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. Also, be sure to get plenty of sleep, keep physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.