

FAQs on Flu Disease

What is the flu?

Influenza is a virus known as “the flu” and it is spread from person to person. In the United States, flu causes 9 million – 41 million illnesses a year, 140,000 – 710,000 hospitalizations, and 12,000 – 52,000 deaths. The flu virus infects the nose, throat, and lungs.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu include fever or feeling feverish/chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and feeling tired. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children.

How does the flu spread?

The flu is spread when a person who has influenza coughs, sneezes, or speaks. This spreads the viruses into the air where other people can breathe in the virus. When flu viruses enter the nose, throat, or lungs of a person, they begin to multiply and cause disease. Flu viruses can also be spread from touching a surface with a flu virus on it and then touching your nose or mouth.

Who is at high risk for the flu?

High risk groups for the flu include:

- Adults aged 65 years and older and children younger than 5 years of age
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions including asthma, heart disease and stroke, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, cancer, children with neurologic conditions
- Racial and ethnic minority groups (non-Hispanic Black persons, non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaskan Native persons, and Hispanic and Latino persons) due to social determinants of health including where people live and work, and other factors which may affect access to healthcare.

People from racial and ethnic minority groups are at higher risk for being hospitalized with the flu and are less likely to get a flu vaccine than non-Hispanic White persons.

How can I protect myself from the flu?

Ways to protect yourself from the flu:

- Take time to get a flu vaccine—this is the best way to prevent the flu
- Perform everyday healthy actions:
 - Avoid contact with people who are sick and stay home when you are sick
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer (that is at least 60% alcohol) if soap is not available
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth

- If you are feeling sick, get tested for flu
- Contact your doctor if you are experiencing severe flu symptoms or if you are at high risk for flu complications so you can get started on antivirals