



You Asked, our CareSource
Physician Answered!

The Complete Guide to All Things Flu



“What causes the flu?”

“Is the flu shot safe?”

“Are the flu and COVID-19 related?”

We know a lot of questions come up around the flu. That’s why we asked one of our physicians at CareSource to answer common flu-related questions.



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Q/A Flu Virus Basic Information

What causes the flu and how does it spread?

The flu is caused by viruses, most commonly the Influenza A and Influenza B viruses. These viruses can spread easily from person to person. They spread mainly through droplets that come from a sick person's nose and mouth when they cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can travel up to six feet and land in the noses and mouths of people nearby.

The flu can also spread when you touch surfaces or objects that have the flu virus on them and then touch your nose or mouth right after. If you get the flu, you could start infecting other people a day before symptoms develop. You stay contagious for 5-7 days after becoming sick. Children may stay contagious for more than seven days.

When do flu symptoms start?

Flu symptoms start 1-4 days after the virus enters the body. That means you may be able to pass the flu to someone else before you know you're sick, as well as while you're sick. You could also be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, you may still spread the virus to others.

What are the emergency warning signs of the flu?



In children...

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish lips or face
- Ribs pulling in with each breath
- Chest pain
- Severe muscle pain (child refuses to walk)
- Signs of dehydration (e.g. no wet diapers or urine for 8 hours, no tears when crying)
- Not being alert or interacting when awake
- Seizures
- In children over 12 months, a fever above 104°F
- In children less than 12 months, a fever over 100.4°F
- Fever or cough that gets better but then comes back or is worse



In adults...

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or the belly that doesn't get better
- Dizziness, confusion or not able to wake up
- Seizures
- Not urinating
- Severe muscle pain
- Severe weakness or lack of balance
- Fever or cough that gets better but then comes back or is worse
- Asthma symptoms that get worse or even cause violent asthma attacks

Get medical help right away for anyone who has any of these emergency warning signs, including yourself.

How do flu symptoms compare to COVID-19 symptoms?

Both infections are contagious respiratory infections. This means they both affect your lungs and other organs that help you breathe properly. But COVID-19 is caused by a different virus than the flu. COVID-19 is caused by the SARS-COV-2 virus and the flu is caused by the Influenza A and/or Influenza B viruses. Even though the viruses are different, the symptoms of the flu and COVID-19 can be very similar.

Common symptoms of both the flu and COVID-19 are below:

| Symptoms | Flu | COVID-19 |
|----------------------------------|-----|----------|
| Fever/chills | ✓ | ✓ |
| Cough | ✓ | ✓ |
| Difficulty breathing | ✓ | ✓ |
| Tiredness | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sore Throat | ✓ | ✓ |
| Muscle and body aches | ✓ | ✓ |
| Headache | ✓ | ✓ |
| Change or loss of taste or smell | | ✓ |

Trying to figure out whether you have the flu or COVID-19 based on symptoms alone can be hard. If you want to confirm which you have, get tested for both of these infections.

Q/A Flu Prevention and Recovery Tips

How can I protect myself and others from the flu virus?

Getting the flu shot every flu season is the best way to protect yourself from the flu. If you get the flu shot, you are less likely to get sick with the flu. If you're not sick with the flu, you can't pass it on to others. By getting the flu shot, you not only protect yourself, but also your friends and family.

There are other healthy habits you can practice to help you stay protected from the flu and prevent the spread of it. Here are some things you can practice:

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue.



Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands afterward.

Wash your hands regularly.



Scrub while you hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice. Use soap and water. If you don't have soap and water, use a sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. It's easy for germs to spread this way.

Stay away from those who are sick and stay home when you are sick.



If you have to be around others, cover your nose and mouth. Also, try not to get too close to others.

Keep all of your spaces clean.



Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched a lot. Clean toys, grocery cart handles and TV remotes often. Go for cleaning products labeled "EPA-approved." Follow directions on product labels.

What do I do if I get the flu?

For the most part, recovering from the flu is about resting and practicing healthy habits. Most people with the flu have mild symptoms and don't need medical care. Continue practicing the healthy habits covered in the previous section of this booklet. Aside from that, here are some other tips to help you recover from the flu:

Drink lots of liquids.

Drink plenty of water and other clear liquids to prevent fluid loss. Fluid loss, also called dehydration, is common when you have the flu, and it can be dangerous.

Stay home and rest until you pass the "fever test".

Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever breaks. Even after your fever breaks, you need to pass the "fever test". There are two parts to passing the "fever test":

1. Your fever should be gone for 24 hours.
2. In those 24 hours, you should not have had any help from fever reducers (like Advil or Tylenol).

Have a child that's sick with the flu?

Make sure they stay at home. If your child gets sick at school, make plans to pick them up right away. This way, you can help keep other children from getting sick and get timely treatment for your child.

Warning: Does your child have a fever? Avoid aspirin!

Anyone 18 years of age and younger who has or might have a fever due to the flu should not be given medications that contain acetylsalicylic acid (like aspirin). Also, avoid medications that contain salicylate (like Pepto Bismol). These medications can cause a rare, but serious condition called Reye's Syndrome. This condition leads to the swelling of the brain, seizures or liver damage.

When should I call my primary care provider (PCP)?

You should call your PCP if you:

- Have severe flu symptoms.
- Are pregnant.
- Are 65 years or older.
- Are at high risk of health-related issues due to the flu.

Your PCP might put you on medications to treat the flu. These medications are called antivirals. They can help you feel better faster and may also prevent serious health-related issues. These medications are not available over the counter. This means you can't buy them without your PCP prescribing them to you. Antivirals can be taken as pills, liquid or an inhaled powder.



Taking Care of Others with the Flu

How can I take care of someone that has the flu without getting it?

If you have a child or other loved one at home who is sick with the flu, you may need to take care of them. While doing this, it's vital to take safety measures to avoid getting infected with the flu virus. Here are some of the things you can do:

Avoid face-to-face contact.

Avoid being face-to-face with the sick person. If possible, try to stay at least six feet away from them. It is also best to spend the least amount of time in close contact with a sick person. If you need to be around a sick person, wear a mask to protect yourself.

Place child's chin on your shoulder.

If a child is sick with the flu, place their chin on your shoulder while holding them. This will help reduce the chances of them coughing in your face.

Wash your hands often.

Wash your hands with soap and water each time you come into contact with a sick person or handle their tissues and laundry. Even if you're just entering their room for a quick second, wash your hands right after. If there's no soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Wash everything used by the sick person.

Things that are used by a sick person are likely to carry the flu virus. Make sure to wash linens, eating utensils and dishes used by those who are sick. These should not be shared without going through a thorough washing.

Q/A Flu Shot Basic Information

Is the flu shot safe?

The flu shot has a long history of being safe. When the flu shot was first introduced to us over 60 years ago, it was tested on thousands of people in clinical trials. It was only approved for the public after it passed strict safety standards. Since then, millions of people all over the world have gotten the flu shot without having any issues. Also, scientific research organizations continue to make sure it's safe for the public.

How does the flu shot work?

The flu shot works by helping your body develop antibodies. Antibodies develop about two weeks after getting the flu shot. They help protect you against the flu virus. As you begin to develop antibodies, you might have mild side effects.

Does the flu shot cost money?

No - the flu shot is completely FREE when you use your CareSource benefits!

Q/A Flu Shot Side Effects

What are the side effects of the flu shot?

Most people who get a flu shot do not have any problems with side effects. But for those who do, side effects are mild. They may include:



- Soreness where the shot was given
- Cough
- Fever or chills
- Body aches
- Headaches
- Tiredness or fatigue

If you have any of these side effects, they will likely begin soon after the shot and last 1-2 days. These side effects are completely normal and not related to the flu. The flu shot does not 'give' you the flu.

Call your PCP or go to an emergency room right away if you have any of these rare, but serious, side effects:



- Trouble breathing or wheezing
- Swelling of the eyes or lips
- Hives
- Weakness
- Fast heartbeat
- Dizziness

Do people ever have serious reactions after getting the flu shot?

While rare, some people can have serious reactions to the flu shot. Here are some of the rare things that could happen after getting a flu shot, and how you can deal with them:

- **Fainting**
Sit or lie down for about 15 minutes after getting your flu shot. This can help prevent fainting and injuries caused by a fall. Tell your PCP if you feel dizzy, have eyesight changes or ringing in your ears.
- **Severe Pain in Injection Site**
Apply a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area. Also, try to use or exercise your arm. If the pain isn't going away, call your PCP.
- **Severe Allergic Reaction**
If you have an allergic reaction, you will notice it within a few minutes to a few hours after getting your flu shot. If this happens, call 911 right away. Rest assured: this only happens to one in a million people.

While these serious reactions sound scary, keep one thing in mind: the chances of these things happening to you are highly unlikely.



Q/A Benefits of the Flu Shot

Why should I get the flu shot?

Getting the flu shot helps protect you from getting infected with the flu virus, also known as influenza. Influenza is a serious respiratory infection that affects your breathing and can lead to hospitalizations or even death for people who are at high risk for health-related issues.

By getting the flu shot, you will be less likely to get infected with the flu virus and get sick. If you're not sick with the flu, you can't pass it on to others. By getting the flu shot, you not only protect yourself, but also your friends and family. Even if you were to get the flu, your symptoms would be less severe. This means you will be unlikely to get seriously ill or end up in the hospital due to the flu.

If that's not reason enough, you can also earn a \$40 reward for getting your flu shot!

I already got the COVID-19 vaccine. Do I still need a flu shot?

Yes, you need a flu shot each year. The viruses that cause the flu are different from the viruses that cause COVID-19. It's true that COVID-19 and the flu can both affect your breathing. However, the COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you from the flu virus.

Can I still get the flu after getting the flu shot?

Yes, it is possible to get the flu shot and still get the flu. But even if you get the flu, your symptoms will be less severe than if you didn't get the flu shot. The flu is a big public health threat. In the past decade, 290,000 people were hospitalized due to the flu. By getting the flu shot, you can help ensure that even if you get the flu, your symptoms stay mild and you can recover at home.



Who, When, Where of Flu Shot

Who should get the flu shot?

Most people six months of age or older should get the flu shot every year. The flu shot is most vital if:

- You're a health care worker who is frequently exposed to sick people.
- You're 50 years of age or older.
- You're pregnant or trying to become pregnant. The flu shot is also safe for breastfeeding mothers.
- You're morbidly obese (i.e., your body mass index (BMI) is 40 or more).
- You live in a nursing home or other long-term care facility.
- You have a chronic condition, like asthma, diabetes or hypertension.
- You have a weakened immune system due to a condition like HIV, or from long-term steroid use.

Who should not get the flu shot?

The flu shot is effective, but it may not be right for everyone. The flu shot may not be the right choice:

- For children younger than six months of age.
- If you've ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS).
- If you have a weakened immune system or take medications to suppress your immune system.

If any of this relates to you, talk to your PCP before getting the flu shot. They will be able to help you make the right decision for yourself and your family.

When should I get the flu shot?

It's best to get your flu shot by the end of October each year. But if this isn't possible, that's OK. You can get your flu shot any time during the flu season, which lasts through May.

Where can I get the flu shot?

You can get your free flu shot at your PCP's office by using your CareSource benefits. You can also get your free flu shot at your local pharmacy. Just go to the pharmacy, show the pharmacist your CareSource member ID card and get your free flu shot. It's that easy!

**Have other questions about the flu shot?
Visit [cdc.gov/flu](https://www.cdc.gov/flu) to learn more!**