What’s influenza (the flu)?

The flu is...

- ...a *contagious viral infection* of the respiratory tract (nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs).
- The flu *usually comes on fast and can cause a wide range of symptoms*, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people may also experience diarrhea and vomiting.
- The flu usually lasts 5-7 days.
- The flu *varies in severity from mild to severe*. If you have a chronic health condition or are pregnant, you may be at higher risk for serious flu-related complications.

The flu isn’t...

- ...a bacterial infection.
- ...a common cold. In general, colds are usually milder and don’t last as long as flu symptoms. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose without a fever.
I don’t like the sound of that. What’s the best way to avoid the flu?

Public health specialists and primary care providers agree: the best way you can avoid getting the flu is by getting your flu shot. The vaccine is updated annually to protect against the types and strains of viruses most likely to be in circulation. Getting a flu vaccine does not give you the flu, and the risk of having a severe allergic reaction to the shot is less than 1 in 4 million.
What else can I do to prevent the spread of the flu?

Do what you usually do to stay healthy!

- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you don’t have access to a sink.

- **Don’t share** eating and drinking utensils, lip balms, solo cups, smoking/vaping paraphernalia, etc.

- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick.

- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs are spread when a person touches something that is contaminated and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.

- **Take care of your immune system** by eating well, getting plenty of sleep, exercising, and managing stress.

- **Avoid things that tax your immune system**, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
All right, you’ve convinced me. How do I get my **FREE** flu shot?

It’s simple!

- *Go to health.cornell.edu/flu* to get the latest info about what campus flu clinics/appointments are available.

- *Flu clinics* are offered across campus throughout the fall.
You, the Flu, & What to Do!

Cornell Health: 607-255-5155
health.cornell.edu/flu
I’ve got a pretty good immune system. If I skip my flu shot, I’m only putting myself at risk, right?

Not really. Have you heard of *herd immunity*? When you get vaccinated, you’re not only protecting yourself from getting sick, you’re also *protecting your community* (your “herd”). The more people get vaccinated, the harder it is for the flu to spread. Plus, it protects individuals who can’t get vaccinated for health reasons.
Oh snap, I think I caught the flu. What should I do?

It’s going to be okay; follow these tips to take care of yourself:

- **Rest up.** Sleep is the best thing you can do to recover. If you don’t rest, it will take longer to recover fully.

- **Drink lots of clear liquids.** To avoid dehydration, drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water, broth, herbal tea, Gatorade, or another non-caffeinated, non-carbonated beverage daily.

- **Eat well.** Your immune system needs the support of adequate nutrition to recover. Bland foods may be the most palatable.

- **Monitor your temperature.** Be aware that you are most contagious when you have a fever.

- **Treat symptoms.** You may recover more comfortably by taking non-prescription medications to treat symptoms: ibuprofen, acetaminophen, throat lozenges, decongestants (check out the pharmacy at Cornell Health). Do NOT take aspirin or aspirin-containing medicines. When in doubt, call Cornell Health and consult with the on-call provider.

- **Antibiotic treatment is not effective treatment for the flu,** because the flu is caused by a virus not bacteria. Antiviral treatment may be recommended for individuals with specific health concerns.
How can I not be “that kid” who gets everyone else sick?

Here’s what you can do:

- **Stay home** from class, work, parties, etc. until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours. (If you’re fever-free because of fever-reducing medicines, it doesn’t count!)

- **Keep distance** (about 6 feet) between yourself and others while you’re sick.

- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to keep those around you from getting your germs.
How do I know if I need to seek medical care?

Usually the flu will run its course and you’ll feel better within about a week. However, call Cornell Health if you have a chronic health condition or if your symptoms worsen or complications develop, including:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach
- Dizziness
- Confusion or change in level of consciousness
- Persistent vomiting
- Difficulty swallowing
- Symptoms improve but then return or worsen
- Rash
- Fever of over 100°F lasting for more than three days or a fever above 103°F
- Any other symptom that concerns you

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