

Published on *SeniorNavigator* (<https://seniornavigator.org>)

Flu: What To Do If You Get Sick

[Español](#)

Common Signs & Symptoms of Flu

Influenza (flu) can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Flu is different from a cold. Flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

**It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

What should I do if I get sick?

Most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. If you get sick with flu symptoms, in most cases, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to get medical care.

If, however, you have symptoms of flu and are in a high-risk group, or are very sick or worried about your illness, contact your health care provider (doctor, physician assistant, etc.).

Certain people are at high risk of serious flu-related complications (including young children, people 65 and older, pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions). This is true both for seasonal flu and novel flu virus infections. (For a full list of people at high risk of flu-related complications, see [People at High Risk of Developing Flu-Related Complications](#)). If you are in a high-risk group and develop flu symptoms, it's best for you to contact your doctor early in your illness. Remind them about your high-risk status for flu. CDC recommends that people at high risk for complications should get antiviral treatment as early as possible, because benefit is greatest if treatment is started within 2 days after illness onset.

Do I need to go to the emergency room if I am only a little sick?

No. The emergency room should be used for people who are very sick. You should not go to the emergency room if you are only mildly ill.

If you have the emergency warning signs of flu sickness, you should go to the emergency room. If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk of flu complications or you are concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice. If you go to the emergency room and you are not sick with the flu, you may catch it from people who do have it.

What are the emergency warning signs of flu?

People experiencing these warning signs should obtain medical care right away.

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)
- Dehydration (no urine for 8 hours, dry mouth, no tears when crying)
- Not alert or interacting when awake
- Seizures
- Fever above 104°F
- In children less than 12 weeks, any fever
- Fever or cough that improves but then returns or worsen

- Worsening of chronic medical conditions

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Persistent dizziness, confusion, inability to arouse
- Seizures
- Not urinating
- Severe muscle pain
- Severe weakness or unsteadiness
- Fever or cough that improves but then returns or worsen
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions

These lists are not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptom that is severe or concerning.

Are there medicines to treat the flu?

Yes. There are drugs your doctor may prescribe for treating the flu called “antivirals.” These drugs can make you better faster and may also prevent serious complications. See [Treatment – Antiviral Drugs](#) for more information.

How long should I stay home if I’m sick?

CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the need to use a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol®. Until then, you should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

CDC also recommends that children and teenagers (anyone aged 18 years and younger) who have flu or are suspected to have flu should not be given Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) or any salicylate containing products (e.g. Pepto Bismol); this can cause a rare, very serious complication called Reye’s syndrome. More information about Reye’s syndrome can be found [here](#).

What should I do while I’m sick?

Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from infecting them. If you must leave home, for example to get medical care, wear a facemask if you have one, or cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Wash your hands often to keep from spreading flu to others.

► **For more information about the COVID-19, go to [coronavirus](#).**

Article Source

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

Source URL

<https://www.cdc.gov>

Last Reviewed

Thursday, June 30, 2022