

Influenza ("the flu")

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. It typically resolves within two weeks without treatment from a medical provider ...

This viral illness tends to come on quickly with its most severe symptoms lasting 3-4 days. While in most cases people feel better after two weeks, the use of non-prescription medications can greatly reduce symptoms.

Symptoms

- Sudden/rapid onset
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fever or feeling feverish with chills
- Dry and persistent cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea

Self-care measures

- Rest as much as possible.
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.
- Use saline nose drops to loosen mucus.
- Use Ibuprofen (Advil®) or Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) to reduce fever/discomfort according to package instructions. Do NOT take aspirin.
- Use oral decongestants (Phenylephrine/Pseudoephedrine) for short-term relief of nasal congestion.
- Use nasal decongestant (Oxymetazoline) for short-term relief of nasal congestion (do not use for more than 3 days). *If you take stimulant medications and/or have a history of significant anxiety/depression, check with a pharmacist before using this medicine.*

(over)

- Gargle with warm salt water and use throat sprays/lozenges (containing Benzocaine) for throat pain.
- Use heated, humidified air (if you do not have a humidifier try taking a hot shower).
- *Special Note:* Antiviral medication (Tamiflu®) is recommended only for those with serious underlying medical conditions who are at risk for severe complications (e.g., those who are pregnant, immunocompromised, have chronic medical conditions, or are morbidly obese).

Preventing spread to others

- Getting the flu vaccine annually is the best prevention.
- If already sick, stay home and away from others (no classes, sports, group meetings, etc.).
- Wait for temperature to become less than 100°F (without medication) for more than 24-hours before resuming classes, etc.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Contain coughs and sneezes using the crook of your elbow.
- Don't share cups or other personal items.

When to seek medical care

- If you are at high risk for complications (e.g., if you are pregnant, immunocompromised, have chronic medical conditions, or are morbidly obese).
- Fever over 102°F for more than 3 days
- Symptoms that last over 10 days and get worse instead of better
- Shortness of breath
- Confusion or disorientation
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Pain/pressure in your chest
- Severe sinus pain
- Very swollen glands in the neck or jaw

To make an appointment at Cornell Health, call 607-255-5155 during business hours, or go to myCornellHealth (from health.cornell.edu) and find a time that works for you.

Other resources

- health.cornell.edu/flu
- cdc.gov/flu

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health.cornell.edu/self-care