

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FLU SEASON

1. What is the flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and, at times, lead to death.

2. How long does it take for flu symptoms to appear after exposure?

The time from when a person is exposed to the flu virus and infected to when symptoms begin is usually one to four days – two days is the average.

3. What are symptoms of the flu?

The main indicators include having a fever greater than 101° F or 38.4° C, plus respiratory symptoms such as cough, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion, and body aches. Some people have headaches, chills, fatigue, nausea/vomiting, or diarrhea.

4. What are the warning signs in patients with the flu, and what should they do?

Warning signs/symptoms in adults include shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, decreased responsiveness or confusion, worsening headaches or seizures, persistent vomiting, diarrhea, inability to keep liquids down, lightheadedness, or dizziness.

In children, some warning signs are fast breathing or trouble breathing, bluish or gray skin discoloration, fever with rash, irritability, and not wanting to be held.

As soon as a person has these symptoms, they MUST contact their health care provider, and, if that provider's office can't be reached, go to the nearest emergency room.

5. When is a person with flu contagious?

A person with the flu is contagious from one day before symptoms develop up to seven days after becoming sick. People with the flu are most contagious in the first three to four days after their illness begins. Note that children and individuals who are immunocompromised, such as transplant patients, may shed (meaning replicate or reproduce) the virus for longer.

6. How is the flu spread?

Flu is mainly spread by person-to-person contact through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread by touching something with flu viruses, such as a doorknob or tissues, then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. The virus can survive for two to eight hours after being deposited on a surface.

7. Who is at risk for complications from the flu?

Per the CDC, the following patients are at increased risk for complications from the flu:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Children younger than 5 years old

- People with asthma
- People with neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions
- People with blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- People with chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
- People with endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
- People with heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
- People with kidney diseases
- People with liver disorders
- People with metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- People who are obese, with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher
- People younger than 19 years old on long-term aspirin- or salicylate-containing medications
- People with a weakened immune system due to disease (such as people with HIV or AIDS or cancers such as leukemia) or medications (such as those receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer, or persons with chronic conditions requiring chronic corticosteroids or other drugs that suppress the immune system)
- People who have had a stroke
- Pregnant people and those within two weeks of post-pregnancy
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People from certain racial and ethnic minority groups, including non-Hispanic Black persons, Hispanic or Latino persons, and American Indian or Alaska Native persons

8. Will I need more than one dose of the flu vaccine?

If you are a healthy adult, you will not need more than one dose of the flu vaccine. Only children 6 months old to 8 years old who receive the flu vaccination for the first time need two doses.

9. Who should get vaccinated for the flu?

CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends that everyone 6 months and older with no contraindications receives a licensed and age-appropriate flu vaccine. There is a list of approved vaccines on the CDC.gov website.

10. What is the nasal flu vaccine (aka FluMist)?

FluMist is a nasal spray flu vaccine approved for use in healthy, non-pregnant people ages 2 through 49 years old. People who are pregnant and people with certain medical conditions should not get the nasal spray flu vaccine. The effectiveness of the nasal flu vaccine can vary from year to year.

11. What is the Fluzone high-dose vaccine?

It is a killed vaccine with a higher concentration of flu antigens than the regular vaccine. It is recommended for people ages 65 and older.

12. What tests can detect the flu?

Rapid flu tests can give results within one hour. However, they tend to have poor sensitivity (can produce false-negative results). If someone has symptoms consistent with the flu and their rapid flu test is negative, a more accurate PCR testing can be performed. PCR flu testing is more sensitive and can detect other respiratory viruses.

13. Who should receive treatment for the flu?

People with suspected or confirmed flu and also a higher risk of complications should receive treatment with appropriate antivirals. Current antivirals approved for flu treatment are Oseltamivir, Zanamivir, Peramivir, and Baloxavir marboxil.

14. What should I do if I have symptoms of the flu?

If you are an employee with flu symptoms, please notify your supervisor and refer to the [Flu Grid](#) for the next steps. Take precautions to prevent flu transmission until you are cleared:

- Wear a mask or maintain a 6-foot distance from others.
- Practice good cough etiquette.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Use hand sanitizers.

Post-flu, most people can return to work once they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without using a fever-reducing medicine. Usually, that will require staying home for three to five days. People taking an antiviral medication tend to shed the virus for a shorter period. Still, they should be completely asymptomatic before returning to direct patient contact.

15. How can I prevent transmission of the flu?

Wash your hands frequently. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then deposit the tissue in a wastebasket and wash your hands with soap and water or a hand sanitizer.

16. What if I have been exposed to someone with the flu?

If while at work you had unprotected exposure (within 6 feet and without a mask) to a patient or an employee with the flu, contact Occupational Health. You may continue working but must monitor yourself for signs and symptoms. If you notice any flu-like symptoms, stop all patient care and immediately contact your supervisor and Occupational Health.

If you had unprotected exposure to someone outside of work with suspected or confirmed flu, contact your health care provider to see if you would be a candidate for post-exposure prophylaxis.

17. What are the infection control precautions to take when evaluating a patient with the flu?

Patients with signs/symptoms of influenza should wear a mask immediately upon entering a healthcare area and be triaged per clinic/ED protocol to be evaluated in a single room and placed on droplet precautions.

When obtaining a nasal specimen, wear a gown, gloves, and face mask. However, if the patient is coughing profusely, then wear a gown, gloves, an N95 mask, and eye protection (face shield/goggles).

Rooms should be wiped down with germicidal wipes between each patient evaluation, and rooms should have single-use thermometers, blood pressure cuffs, and other necessary equipment that should remain in that room only.

18. What are the infection-control precautions for someone admitted to the unit with the flu?

Patients admitted to the flu unit should be placed on contact and droplet precautions. Isolation control measures can be discontinued once the patient becomes asymptomatic and if fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications. Rooms should be terminally disinfected between patients. Visitors should be restricted.

19. What precautions should we take when transporting a patient with the flu?

Flu patients should wear a face mask, practice good cough etiquette, and avoid touching objects unnecessarily. The transporter should wear gloves and a face mask (optional).

Please call 214-633-4699 or page 214-362-1163 for further questions. You can also go to texasflu.org or cdc.gov/flu/about/index.html for more information.

Flu vs. Cold		
Signs and Symptoms	Influenza	Cold
Symptom onset	Abrupt	Gradual
Fever	Usual: lasts 3-4 days	Rare
Aches	Usual: often severe	Slight
Chills	Fairly common	Uncommon
Fatigue, weakness	Usual	Sometimes
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common
Stuffy nose	Sometimes	Common
Sore throat	Sometimes	Common
Chest discomfort, cough	Common: can be severe	Mild to moderate: hacking cough
Headache	Common	Rare

Reference: [cdc.gov/flu/consumer/symptoms.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/symptoms.htm)

Note: Patients exhibiting flu-like illness/respiratory illness should be given a mask and placed in a room as soon as possible.