



## Flu prevention

# Key Facts About Seasonal Flu

When flu season comes around, it's important to know the facts. Protect yourself and your family from infection by learning more about the flu. Then, take steps to prevent it by following these tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

### What is flu?

Influenza, or flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. It may seem like just an inconvenience, but it can become severe or cause life-threatening complications. Symptoms include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Gastrointestinal signs, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, are more common among children.

Flu spreads when a sick person coughs, sneezes or speaks. This sends the virus into the air. Then, other people may inhale it through their nose, throat or lungs. Once

breathed in, the germs multiply and cause symptoms. Touching a surface with the virus and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes also can spread flu.

### When can a person pass flu along?

Adults may be contagious from one day before developing symptoms to up to five days after getting sick. Children can be contagious for more than seven days.

### Are there ways to prevent it?

The single best way to prevent flu is to get vaccinated each fall, if possible. This is especially important for people that are at a higher risk for flu complications. This includes people ages 50 and older, people with a chronic medical condition, pregnant women, residents of long-term care facilities, health care workers, people in contact with children younger than age six months and children ages six months to five years.



### When I get a flu vaccination, how long before it takes effect?

On average, it takes 7–14 days for the flu vaccine to become fully effective in the body. However, once people are vaccinated, they immediately build antibodies and build up some immunity within a day or two.

### Where can I find the most current information about flu vaccination supply and recommendations/restrictions on immunizations?

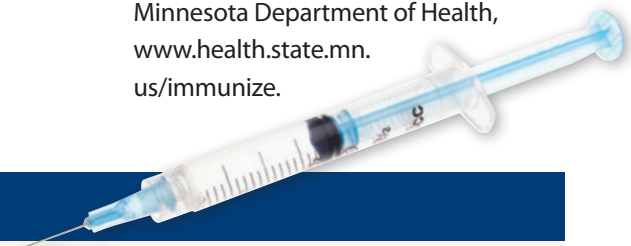
Medica updates its Web site with information gathered from either the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) or the Minnesota Department of Health, [www.health.state.mn.us/immunize](http://www.health.state.mn.us/immunize).

Source: 2008 CallLink<sup>®</sup> materials

## QUICK TAKE – Stop the spread of germs

It's important to be watchful to protect yourself from flu. Follow these steps to prevent the spread of infection:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze – throw the tissue away after you use it.
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Stay away – as much as you can – from people who are sick.
- If you get the flu, stay home from work or school. If you are sick, avoid going near other people.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth as germs often spread this way.
- Get regular exercise, enough rest and eat healthy, balanced meals.



## Taking Care of Colds and Flu

Since colds and flu are caused by viruses, antibiotics won't cure you. Over-the-counter medicines will help relieve your symptoms. Make sure to always follow directions carefully. Some prescription antiviral medicines are used to treat flu, but they must be taken within two days of the start of symptoms. Ask your doctor if these medicines would be right for you.

If you have any additional health concerns, check with your doctor before taking any medicines. Call your doctor if you're sick and are age 65 or older, have a chronic health condition or begin to have problems breathing.

### Self-Care

If you're ill, get plenty of rest and drink enough fluids. Avoid using alcohol and tobacco. You also can take over-the-counter medications to relieve your symptoms. Don't give aspirin to anyone younger than age 19. It's

linked to Reye's syndrome, a rare but sometimes fatal condition.

### When It Gets Worse

Sometimes a cold or flu may turn into something more serious. This may include bacterial infections such as sinusitis or pneumonia. Unlike colds or flu, these illnesses may need to be treated with antibiotics. For either a cold or flu, call your doctor if complications develop, such as:

- Persistent high fever
- Ear pain
- Severe sore throat
- Coughing up green, yellow or brown mucus

Call your doctor immediately if your symptoms are unusually severe, or if you're having trouble breathing. Also call your doctor right away if you have symptoms of flu and are in a group at higher risk for complications.

## Novel H1N1 (swine flu): Be prepared, not panicked

There is a lot we do not know about the H1N1 virus (swine flu). We do know that these tips can help prevent the spread of this flu:

- This fall, watch the news for information about the availability of the H1N1 vaccine. Then, check with your doctor about getting the vaccine.
- Take normal precautions to fight germs. Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze; wash your hands often; stay away from others who are ill; and stay at home when you are sick. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay informed through reliable sources, such as Medica (medica.com), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/) and your doctor.
- Call your doctor if you experience symptoms. They are similar to symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, body aches and sore throat.

The H1N1 vaccine is not meant to replace the seasonal flu vaccine. It is meant to be used along with seasonal flu vaccine to protect people. Both vaccines may be given on the same day.

## Upper Respiratory Infection: Cold or Flu?

### How to help tell the difference

#### Cold symptoms

- Generally starts gradually and lasts three to seven days
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Headache

#### Flu symptoms

- Sore throat
- Congestion
- Fatigue
- Usually starts suddenly and lasts seven to 10 days

- Fever, often above 101° F
- Headache
- Aching muscles
- Fatigue
- Coughing
- Congestion

Source: 2008 CallLink® materials

### TO LEARN MORE

Have questions about the flu or other health concerns? Call the Medica CallLink® nurse line any time, day or night at 1-800-962-9497.

Discover all the valuable health and wellness programs for you at [medica.com/managemyhealth](http://medica.com/managemyhealth).