

Influenza

Learn how to stay healthy during flu season.

Before and during the flu season, it is important to learn about influenza and how to keep yourself and your family as healthy as possible.

What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza is an illness that is caused by a **virus*** that can make you feel very sick. Every year in the United States, influenza **epidemics** occur during the fall and winter months.

Influenza (the flu) is a viral infection that is very **contagious**. It can spread from person to person in **droplets** created by coughing and sneezing. It can also be spread when people cough or sneeze onto their hands and then touch things.

Anyone can get the flu. However, some people can get much sicker. The young, the elderly and people with chronic lung disease, like CF, or heart conditions can get very sick from the flu.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms include:

- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Being tired
- Fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat

In people with CF, influenza can lead to severe **pneumonia**. If you have the flu, you will have many of the symptoms listed above.

Most likely you will feel worse than you do with your usual lung infection or **pulmonary exacerbation**.

Antiviral medications are available to treat people when they get the flu. They are most effective if taken within 24 hours of the start of symptoms to get these medicines.

It is important to contact your CF care center or doctor as soon as you feel flu-like symptoms.

These drugs may help lessen your symptoms or how long you are ill. They do not prevent you from getting the flu.

What can we do to prevent influenza?

Experts in CF and immunizations have developed the following guidelines to help prevent the flu:

Get vaccinated. Each year in the fall and winter, the influenza **vaccination**, or “flu shot,” is given to people with CF, their family members and their health care providers. This helps to prevent the flu by increasing the body’s **immunity** to the current types of the flu virus.

People who are in close contact with people with CF should also get the flu shot. This will help protect people with CF from influenza. Early in the fall is the best time to get vaccinated, but getting vaccinated in December or January is still helpful as flu season can last until the spring.

Flu vaccine spray. You may have heard about the “flu vaccine spray.” This vaccine is sprayed into the nose. It is only approved for healthy people ages 2 to 49 years. People with any kind of lung disease, like CF or asthma, cannot get this type of flu vaccine. However, family members without CF or other health conditions can get the “flu vaccine spray.”

Practice good health habits. Infection control measures can reduce the spread of flu. These habits include:

- **Clean your hands.** Clean your hands **often** with soap and water or with a 60 percent alcohol-based hand gel (**especially after coughing or sneezing**). This will help protect you and others around you.
- **Stop the spread.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Discard the tissue into a waste basket or covered container. Make sure you clean your hands afterward to prevent spreading germs to others.
- **Don’t touch.** Limit how much you touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that has germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.

*Words that appear in **bold italics** are defined at the end.

- **Stay home.** If you are sick, just stay home. You will help prevent others from becoming sick.
- **Keep your distance.** Avoid close contact with people who are sick (**stay at least 3 feet or an arm's length away**). When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick.
- **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of sleep, drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritious food, be physically active and manage your stress.

Are there any side effects from the “flu shot”?

The flu shot does not give you the flu because the viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated). The risk of the flu shot causing serious harm is very small. However, like any vaccine, you could have mild side effects such as soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given, a low-grade fever or some mild aches. If these problems happen, they will begin shortly after the shot and usually last 1-2 days. If you are allergic to eggs, talk with your doctor about other ways to get your flu vaccination.

What is an influenza pandemic?

A **pandemic** is a disease outbreak that occurs around the world. A flu pandemic occurs if a new flu strain emerges for which people have little or no immunity and for which there is no available vaccine. Thus, a flu pandemic could spread easily and cause serious illness in many people in many countries in a very short time.

More Information

Learn more about germs and infection control:

- Watch the CF Education Day webcast “Infection Control & Germs” at www.cff.org/LivingWithCF/Webcasts/ArchivedWebcasts/Germs.
- Read the pamphlet: “Lung Health: What You Should Know About Germs,” available from your care center or the CF Foundation at www.cff.org/UploadedFiles/LivingWithCF/StayingHealthy/Germs/WhatYouShouldKnow/Lung-Health-What-You-Should-Know-About-Germs.pdf.

If you have specific questions about the flu:

- Contact your care center.
- Call the CF Foundation at **1-800-FIGHT CF** (1-800-344-4823) or email info@cff.org.

Find more information on the flu at:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/flu
- World Health Organization: www.who.org
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.flu.gov

Glossary

Contagious: Able to be spread from person to person, like an illness.

Droplets: Tiny drops of liquid that comes from the mouth, nose or lungs.

Epidemics: A disease affecting many people at the same time that spreads from person to person.

Immunity: The body’s ability to protect itself against germs.

Pandemic: A disease occurring around the whole world, an epidemic on a worldwide scale.

Pneumonia: An infection of the lungs often caused by bacteria or virus.

Pulmonary exacerbation: Signs and symptoms of a lung infection that needs treatment.

Vaccination: A shot or injection that puts a liquid into the body to build its defense or immunity against an infection.

Virus: A tiny organism that can cause infections.



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