



When To Seek Care for Influenza: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. Flu usually comes on suddenly and can cause mild to severe illness. The best way to prevent getting the flu is to get vaccinated. Call your doctor or the Philadelphia Department of Public Health for more information about the flu vaccine.

What are the signs and symptoms of flu?

The signs and symptoms of flu include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Diarrhea and vomiting

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

Most persons with the flu will get better without seeing a doctor or taking prescription drugs. If you have flu symptoms you should:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Rest as much as possible
- Use over-the-counter medicines to relieve the symptoms of the flu
- Stay home (except to get medical care)
- Limit your contact with others
- Wash your hands often
- Cover your coughs and sneezes preferably with a tissue

How long should I stay home if I am sick?

The Philadelphia Department of Health recommends that people with flu symptoms stay home for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. Your fever should be gone without the use of fever reducing medicine like acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) or ibuprofen (e.g., Motrin).

If I think I have flu, when should I contact my doctor?

You should contact your doctor if you develop flu symptoms and you are at high risk to develop complications of the flu, or you are severely ill. Your doctor will determine if you need to be treated with antiviral drugs for your illness.

People at high risk to develop flu complications are:

- Children younger than 5 years old – particularly children younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Pregnant women
- People who have chronic medical conditions including: cancer, blood disorders (including sickle cell disease), chronic lung disease (including asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)), diabetes, heart disease, kidney disorders, liver disorders, neurological disorders, neuromuscular disorders (including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis) or weakened immune systems (including people with AIDS)

When should I go to the emergency room?

You should not go to the emergency room if you are only a little sick. However, if you become very ill and experience any of the following warning signs, go to an emergency room or urgent care center immediately.

In children:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color (call 911 immediately)
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

In adults:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

For more information contact your doctor, refer to www.phila.gov/health/DiseaseControl/FightingFlu.html or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.