

**What is influenza**?

Influenza, or the flu, is a virus. A virus is a particle that infects cells of the body.

**Why should I be concerned?** (1,2,3)

The Centers for Disease control estimated that 56,000 people in the United states died from flu related complications in 2012-2013 (4).

Influenza can damage the lining of your lungs. This can lead to a bacterial infection of your lung. This is called pneumonia.

The elderly, young, pregnant, and those with lung disease are at higher risk for complications. People with compromised immune systems are also at higher risk.

Contact your doctor if:

* You have trouble breathing.
* You have pain/pressure in chest or stomach.
* You get dizzy when standing or are not urinating.
* You are confused.
* You cannot stop vomiting.

**Why are antibiotics not helpful**?

Antibiotics treat bacteria. Influenza is caused by a virus.

**What can I do to treat myself?** (1,2)

Rest allows your body to focus on fighting the infection. Remaining hydrated is important as well. Your urine should be light yellow or clear.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) treats fever, headache, and muscle aches.

**What can I do to prevent catching the flu**? (1,2,3)

Influenza is spread through droplets from sneezing and coughing. Often, these droplets land on surfaces in the environment, such as door handles and tables. The virus in droplets can survive for extend periods of time. Touching these surfaces and then touching your mouth or eyes can infect you. Proper hand washing or use of an alcohol based hand sanitizer reduces risk of infection.

Yearly influenza vaccination also reduces your risk. It is especially recommended for children, the elderly, and those with respiratory illnesses due to higher complication risks. It is also recommended to get if you have a family member at risk that cannot get the vaccine.

**I heard you can get the flu even after you got the vaccine**. (5)

There are thousands of strains of influenza that exist. The influenza virus is constantly mutating. The most common strains are predicted and used to create the vaccine. This has to occur months ahead of flu season so the vaccines can be made. This is why you can still catch the flu after getting the vaccine. However, it still reduces your risk of catching the flu. Flu vaccines are often offered in the fall at medical centers and pharmacies.

References

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2. “NIH Fact Sheets - Influenza.” *National Institutes of Health*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, report.nih.gov/NIHfactsheets/ViewFactSheet.aspx?csid=133.
3. “Influenza.” *National Institutes of Health*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 27 Jan. 2016, www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/nih-turning-discovery-into-health/influenza.
4. CDC. Estimating Seasonal Influenza-Associated Deaths In the United States (2018), Accessed on March 5th, 2018, from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/us_flu-related_deaths.htm>
5. “Influenza Vaccines.” *National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 20 Feb. 2019, www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/influenza-vaccines.