

Flu Facts

How do you know if you have the flu?

- Flu starts quickly, not like colds, which usually start slowly over a few days.
- Fever, usually above 101, with chills
- Runny nose
- Chest tightness and cough
- Muscle aches and headache

The flu usually starts with headache, body aches, chills and fever that may last for 5-7 days. The cough and tired feeling may last for 2-3 weeks after the fever and other symptoms go away.

What isn't the flu?

- Bad colds or mild respiratory illnesses
- "Stomach flu" or nausea, diarrhea and/or vomiting are NOT part of influenza. Different germs most often cause stomach problems.

What is the flu?

Three different viruses cause the flu, but they each can change their structure, so it's possible to catch the flu more than once, each time the germ changes.

How is the flu spread?

An infected person who coughs or sneezes spreads the flu. You can catch the flu by breathing in air with the germs from the cough or sneeze, but usually the germs are on the person's hands. When the sick person touches anything like the phone, handrails, or doorknobs, you can pick them up on your hands. You actually make yourself sick when you rub your eyes, put pens or paper clips into your mouth, chew your nails, or eat without washing your hands first.

What do I take care of myself if I get the flu?

- Rest and drink fluids. The flu is very contagious so stay home to prevent spreading it to co-workers or others. Drink plenty of fluid and take cold and/or fever medication for comfort. Aspirin should **never** be given to children when they have the flu because of the danger of Reye's Syndrome. Use acetaminophen (Tylenol), or ask your doctor about ibuprofen (Advil) use in children.

How do I protect myself from catching the flu?

- Stay away from malls and stores, any place where there are lots of people during cold and flu season. If you have to go, remember not to put your hands in your mouth and make sure you wash your hands before you eat.
- WASH YOUR HANDS! Frequent handwashing and breaking the habit of putting your fingers in your mouth or chewing on pens etc, will help keep you well. Recent studies prove the benefit of handwashing. I've included the web sites you can read for yourself. If you know that a LARGE percentage of people using public restrooms do not wash their hands, do you see how you can pick up germs from door knobs and hand rails?

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- One of the best ways to keep yourself well is to teach your children and the kids in your classroom to wash their hands. And to keep them well, they should wash before lunch or any snacks. I have a great new demo lesson on handwashing, but I've been housebound here with sick kids. Call me to set up a time to bring your students here and we can practice handwashing.
- The flu vaccine provides good protection against the flu for those with chronic illnesses such as heart disease or lupus. Ask your doctor if you should have the flu vaccine.

Web sites

<http://www.microbe.org/washup/importance.asp>

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsehandw.html>