



Five Flu Facts

By Ralph Morris, MD, MPH

1. **Getting the flu vaccine is strategic.** Getting the annual flu vaccine is the single best thing you can do to prevent the flu. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu shot for everyone six months old and older. Some folks are proudly posting their “vax” photos on the [CDC's website!](#) Follow on Twitter at [#VaxWithMe](#).



CDC director, Dr. Tom Frieden gets this year's flu vaccine. Photo from

www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals

2. **Flu can be complicated.** Although most people who get the flu will have a mild illness, flu complications can include pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus or ear infections and even death. Those at high risk for flu-related complications include pregnant women; children younger than five, but especially children younger than two; people 65 years old and older; and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

Unsure as to whether you have the flu or the common cold? This [chart](#) can help you decide.

3. **Timing is everything.** According to CDC, flu activity usually peaks in January or later, but outbreaks can happen as early as October. *It takes about two weeks after being vaccinated for the body's immune response to kick in fully.*

Planning holiday visits? Take a look at the calendar and schedule your flu shot to make sure you arrive for holiday gatherings as fully protected as possible.

4. **Prevention is key.** The flu virus wants you! Evade it by:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Staying home when you are sick
- Covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or cough into your sleeve
- Washing your hands frequently with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds

For Frequently Touched Surfaces:

Clean surfaces first with detergent and water and then sanitize using 1 tablespoon of regular strength household bleach (5.25%) in 1 gallon of water. If using concentrated bleach (8.25%), reduce bleach volume to 2 teaspoons per gallon of water. Let surfaces air dry.

- Keeping your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces in your environment
- Getting sufficient exercise, hydration, nutrition and rest

5. **A flu pandemic (a world-wide flu epidemic) would be another story altogether.** Flu severity is unpredictable from year to year. While it's not expected this year, a flu pandemic is always a possibility. To keep tabs on the flu, CDC provides a [weekly flu surveillance report](#). The website includes a handy "Flu Activity Map" to indicate the geographic spread of flu through the US.

To get an idea of how you could prepare for a pandemic flu outbreak, check out [Dr. Ralph's Flu Preparedness Closet](#). Forewarned is forearmed!

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