

Flu Season Survival Tips

By Ralph Morris, MD, MPH

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In a nutshell...

Increase your chances of surviving flu season by getting vaccinated and taking other common-sense precautions, such as disinfecting frequently touched surfaces. Helpful “flu facts” can raise your awareness and understanding of flu.

The [World Health Organization](#) calls flu, also known as *seasonal influenza*, “one of the world’s greatest public health challenges.” Every year approximately one billion people around the world are infected with the seasonal flu virus, and three to five million of those cases are severe, resulting in 290,000 - 650,000 flu-related respiratory deaths. The severity of each flu season is difficult to predict, so the public is encouraged to be aware and prepared. Here are our best tips to help you survive flu season.

1. **Get the flu vaccine.** We say it every year because it is true: The best way to protect against the seasonal flu is by getting the flu vaccine. Flu vaccines are updated each year to better match the three or four most common viruses expected to be circulating. Additionally, there are several different flu vaccines available depending on the recipient’s age and health status. Be sure to check with your health care provider to determine the most appropriate vaccine for you.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates the flu vaccine prevents millions of illnesses and flu-related doctor visits each year. CDC [recommends](#) everyone 6 months old and older get a flu vaccine each year, ideally by the end of October. If you missed that deadline, later is better than never!

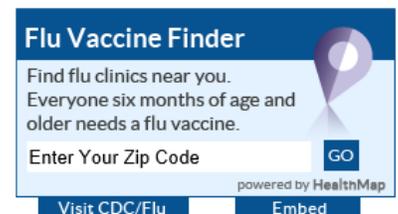
Getting vaccinated can help protect the people around you too, including children and the elderly, who may be more vulnerable to flu. And even if you get the flu after being vaccinated (that can happen when the flu vaccine does not match the circulating viruses exactly), your illness may be milder.

Not sure where to go to get your flu vaccine? Enter your zip code into the “Flu Vaccine Finder” at right for flu clinics near you.

2. **Be proactive about avoiding the flu virus.** Keep your distance from people who are sick with the flu, and stay home to limit contact with others if you get the flu. Anti-viral face masks can be helpful.



A [2017 study](#) showed that getting a flu vaccine can significantly reduce a child’s risk of dying from flu



Additionally:

- ✓ Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the crook of your elbow.
 - ✓ [Wash your hands](#) frequently and thoroughly and keep them away from your mouth and eyes.
 - ✓ Disinfect frequently touched surfaces during flu season: Clean surfaces first with soap and water, and then disinfect using ¼ cup of regular strength bleach (~6%) mixed into 1 gallon of water. Air dry. Alternatively, wipe down surface with disposable pre-moistened wipes containing chlorine bleach.
 - ✓ If you have a loved one who is at high risk of flu complications and they develop flu symptoms, encourage them to seek a medical evaluation for possible treatment with flu antiviral drugs.
 - ✓ Maintain a healthy lifestyle to optimize your immune system defense.
3. **Know your “flu facts.”** Viruses, such as the flu virus, require living hosts (that’s us) to survive and multiply. When the virus invades your body—say you [breathe it in](#) after a sick person near you has coughed--your immune system is stimulated to fight off the virus. If your immune system is unsuccessful, flu symptoms may appear in one to four days, but you may be contagious *as soon as one day before symptoms appear and five to seven days later*, according to a 2016 [study](#).

CDC notes children and some people with weakened immune systems may pass the virus for over seven days. Confused about flu symptoms versus cold symptoms? This chart can help: [“Is it the Flu or the Common Cold?”](#)

Because there are different strains of seasonal flu, you may get flu more than once in a season. Most people who get the flu recover in a period ranging from a few days to less than two weeks. Complications triggered by flu are possible. These range from moderate, such as sinus and ear infections, to serious, including pneumonia, swelling of the heart, brain, or muscle tissue, and [sepsis](#), a life-threatening response to infection.

Where is flu spreading now? You can track seasonal flu activity on CDC’s [FluView](#) website.

May you be healthy and flu-free all season!

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