

Avoiding the Flu: Steps to Protect People with Asthma

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. If left untreated, it could lead to pneumonia or other serious complications, especially in people ages 65 and older, people who are pregnant, and people with medical conditions such as asthma, heart disease, and kidney disease.

The flu can affect your lungs when you have asthma. It can cause inflammation (swelling) and narrowing of your airways. These changes could trigger or worsen asthma symptoms. If you have asthma, defending yourself against the flu is very important.



What you can do to avoid the flu:

Get the flu vaccine every year. The flu spreads from fall through spring. People who are 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine, which can prevent influenza.

Make it a family affair. Vaccinate the whole family to protect family members who have asthma.

Prevent exposure. The flu can be very contagious. Wash your hands well and often, don't touch your face, and don't share food or utensils. If possible, avoid people who are sick. Wearing a mask helps to protect you when you are in close contact with someone who is ill.

Talk with your doctor. Update your Asthma Action Plan with your doctor so you know what to do if you get sick.

If you get sick with flu symptoms, call your doctor immediately. People with asthma can quickly become sicker with the flu. Your doctor may recommend treatment with an antiviral medicine and/or a change to your regular asthma treatment. Antiviral medicine works best when started within one to two days of getting sick. These medicines can make you feel better faster and make the flu feel milder. Get tested for the flu and seek medical treatment as soon as possible.

You can spread the flu before you even know you're sick.

Unlike asthma, the flu is contagious. The flu spreads from coughing and sneezing. It usually spreads from person to person. You can also get the flu by touching something with the flu virus on it (such as doorknobs or tables) or shaking hands, and then touching your mouth or nose.

This is why preventing the flu by getting a flu vaccine is important.

Common Flu Symptoms

The flu usually starts suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever (often very high, 101 F or above)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness or weakness
- Chills
- Constant cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches in bones and/or muscles
- Diarrhea and vomiting (more common in children)

Symptoms from other illnesses like COVID-19, the common cold, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), allergies, or asthma can be similar to the flu and may be confusing. You can also have both the flu and COVID-19 at the same time. You can get tested at urgent care centers, walk-in clinics, or your neighborhood pharmacy. You can also use an at-home test kit. Contact your doctor to get a proper diagnosis.



Emergency Symptoms of the Flu

Seek emergency medical help right away if you show these signs:

In children:

- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- Change in color on tongue, lips, around the eyes, fingertips, or nail beds – the color may appear grayish, whitish, or bluish depending on skin tone
- Not waking up, not interacting, or not conscious
- Being irritable and difficult to comfort
- Flu-like symptoms seem to improve but return with worse fever and cough
- Serious or constant vomiting
- Fever with a rash

In adults:

- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- Pain in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Not waking up, not interacting, or not conscious
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Who Should Get the Flu Vaccine?

People who are 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every year. There are different flu vaccines for different ages. The high-dose vaccine is for people ages 65 and older.

How Does the Flu Vaccine Work?

- Every year, new batches of flu vaccine are made with different virus strains.
- The vaccine encourages your body to make antibodies to help you fight off flu infection.
- If you get the flu vaccine, you are less likely to catch the flu virus. And if you do get sick with flu, you are more likely to recover easily and have a lower risk of complications.

Should I Get the Flu Shot or Nasal Spray Vaccine?

- People with asthma 6 months and older should get the flu shot. The nasal spray is **not recommended** in most cases for people with asthma.
- If you or your child (ages 5 and older) must have a needle-free option and **your asthma is well-controlled**, talk with your doctor about nasal spray vaccine options.

Who Should Not Get the Flu Vaccine?

- Children younger than 6 months of age are too young to get a flu vaccine.
- If you have a latex allergy or have had a reaction to a previous flu shot, talk with your doctor before getting a flu shot.
- If you have severe, life-threatening allergies to any ingredient in a flu vaccine (other than egg proteins*), you should not get the shot.

*If you have an egg allergy, you can safely get a flu shot. This is true no matter how severe your egg allergy was in the past. This includes people who have a history of a severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis [anna-fih-LACK-sis] after eating egg or egg-containing foods.