

Community of Hope AME Church Helps You Take Action to Prevent the Flu



Nobody likes the flu but this respiratory diseases shows up every year anyway. This year, the flu virus is turning out to be a particularly aggressive unwelcome guest and Maryland is a hot spot. State and federal health officials say influenza seems to be making more people sick. State health officials, who keep a partial tally of people who go to the doctor and the emergency room with influenza symptoms, report that activity spiked in mid-December and has continued to get worse.

What is Influenza (also called Flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

Signs and Symptoms of Flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms that usually start suddenly, not gradually:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in young children than in adults.

It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

How Flu Spreads

The flu viruses spread mainly by tiny droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. A person might also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

Period of Contagiousness

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Although people with the flu are most contagious in the first 3-4 days after their illness begins, some otherwise healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others with flu viruses for an even longer time.

Onset of Symptoms

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus and infected to when symptoms begin is about 1 to 4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

Prevention

Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs and prevent the flu:

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an **alcohol-based hand rub**.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.
- Get the flu vaccine. It's not too late.

Flu Vaccine

While there are many different flu viruses, a flu vaccine protects against the viruses that research suggests will be most common for the season. Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctors' visits, and missed work and school due to flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every year before flu activity begins in their community. CDC recommends getting vaccinated by the end of October, if possible. Unlike what many believe, the flu vaccine will not give you the flu. The vaccine is made from an inactivated virus that can't transmit infection. So people who get sick after receiving a flu vaccination were going to get sick anyway.

Flu Treatment

Flu symptoms can cause a world of misery, from fever and cough to sore throat, nasal congestion, aches, and chills. But there are ways to feel better.

Prescription antiviral drugs may ease symptoms of the flu but they must be taken shortly after you get sick so go to the doctor as soon as signs appear to receive the prescription antiviral medication. Studies show that flu antiviral drugs work best for treatments when they are started within 2 days of getting sick. However, starting them later can still be helpful, especially if the

sick person has a high-risk health condition or is very sick from the flu. In many cases simple home remedies may be all you need for relief of mild to moderate flu symptoms.

1. Over-the Counter Medications. The flu treatment you choose should depend on your symptoms. For example, if you have nasal or sinus congestion, then a decongestant can be helpful. If you have a runny nose, postnasal drip, or itchy, watery eyes -- then an antihistamine may be helpful for your flu symptoms.

Warning: Decongestants can increase blood pressure and heart rate. Pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine are oral decongestants commonly available in over-the-counter products. In general, if your blood pressure is well controlled with medications, then a decongestant shouldn't be a problem as long as you monitor your blood pressure. This may not be true, however, with certain types of blood pressure medications. Check with your doctor or pharmacist about safety.

2. Drink up. The flu can leave you dehydrated, especially if you have vomiting or diarrhea. So be sure to get enough fluids. Water is fine. So are fruit juices and electrolyte beverages. You may want to stay away from caffeinated drinks, because caffeine is a diuretic. Herbal tea with honey can soothe a sore throat. You will know you are getting enough fluids if your urine is pale yellow, almost colorless.

3. Sip some soup. For generations, caring parents have been serving chicken soup to kids with colds and flu. Mom was right, chicken soup may help with symptoms of upper respiratory tract infections like the flu. The belief is that when you lean over a bowl of hot chicken soup and the vapor gets up your nose and helps relieve congestion. It also helps to keep you hydrated.

4. Be a couch potato. Listen to your body. If it's telling you not to exercise, don't. If it's urging you to spend all day in bed, do. Don't press on with daily chores even in the face of severe cold or flu symptoms. Rest is another way of supporting the body's ability to fight infection. Good sleep cycles help the immune system work well, so it's important to get your full eight hours of sleep each night.

5. Humidify. Breathing moist air helps ease nasal congestion and sore throat pain. One good strategy is to indulge in a steamy shower several times a day -- or just turn on the shower and sit in the bathroom for a few minutes, inhaling the steam. Another is to use a steam vaporizer or a humidifier. Clean it often to make sure it's free of mold and mildew.

6. Make a tent. Need a quick way to open clogged airways? Bring a pot of water to a boil and remove it from the heat. Drape a towel over your head, close your eyes, and lean over the water under the "tent," breathing deeply through your nose for 30 seconds. You can also add a drop or two of peppermint or eucalyptus oil to the water for extra phlegm-busting power. Repeat this as often as necessary to ease congestion.

7. Try a warm compress. On the forehead and nose, a warm cloth is a great way to relieve headache or sinus pain.