



## How to Prevent the Flu

If you don't make an effort to prevent it, odds are that you'll catch the flu this season.

For most of us it means a couple of weeks out of work or school, then life goes back to normal. But the flu can be serious, even deadly, if you have a health condition like asthma, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, or a weakened immune system.

The trick is not to get sick in the first place. Here are proven ways to avoid the flu.

### Get Vaccinated

Experts say the single best way to avoid the flu is to get the vaccine as soon as you can. The ideal time is early fall. But any time during the winter is fine if you have not already received it.

The vaccine is designed to protect against the flu strains health experts believe will be the most widespread each season – for example, the H1N1 “swine flu.” Some vaccines work against three flu strains – you might hear them called trivalent. Others guard against four strains – doctors will call them quadrivalent. **We have the quadrivalent vaccine.**

### Build a Germ Barrier

It's easy to catch the flu. When a nearby sick person sneezes or coughs, they send out a spray of virus-laden droplets straight to your open mouth or nose.

You can also pick it up from touching a surface – like the restaurant table where a sick person dined before you. Flu germs can linger on places like tables, counters, desks, doorknobs, and faucets for up to 8 hours.

When you touch a germ surface and put your hands on your eyes, nose, or mouth, your fingers bring the virus right into your body.

You can try to avoid sick people, but that's not always easy to do, especially when you're in close quarters like movie theaters and malls. If you can't steer clear of the virus, at least use good hygiene to create a barrier against flu germs.

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap every time you shake hands or touch a surface that might be germ-covered.
- Carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with you for times when you can't get to a sink.
- Bring along disinfectant wipes to clean any surfaces you're about to touch.
- Take extra care to not touch your mouth, eyes, or nose without washing your hands first.
- Sharing is wonderful, but not during flu season. Be stingy with your utensils, plates, glasses, and anything else you touch with your mouth. Wash used dishes and utensils in the dishwasher or in the sink with hot water and soap.

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## Take Your Medicine

All these steps should keep you pretty well armed against the flu. Still, even the best defense isn't perfect.

In case you do get sick, ask your doctor about the antiviral flu drugs like oseltamivir (Tamiflu), peramivir (Rapivab), and zanamivir (Relenza). They can help you get better faster. But you need to take them within the first 2 days of getting sick.

If you do come down with the flu this season, look out for others. You can spread it for up to a week after you get sick. Don't share germs with your friends, family, and co-workers.

- Stay home until you feel better and your fever has been gone (without the help of medicine) for at least 24 hours.
- Sneeze into your elbow, not your hand. That way you can't pass it around.
- Toss used tissues after you blow your nose. Don't leave them lying around for someone else to find.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) still recommends universal vaccination for anyone age 6 months and older who does not have a contraindication. At this time, ACIP does not make a preferential recommendation for any influenza vaccine product for any age group.

## Medicine Bottles

Flu season has started. Please always bring your medicine bottles to your doctor visits. Don't forget to bring your over the counter, medicinal herbs, or other health related supplements when you come to see me. That important information helps me help you.

## Food Labels

Lastly, do not be afraid to bring your food can/bottle/bag nutrition labels, so I can help you decipher what they mean; what they mean to your health.

Jorge Duchicela, M.D.