

# Knowing what to do — and not to do — about the flu



## Know your facts about the flu

If you've ever had the flu, you know how sick you can be. Chances are good that some of the advice friends and family gave you about the flu was incorrect. Take a look at the top ten common flu myths and be sure to arm yourself with correct information next flu season.

### **Myth #1: You can catch the flu from the vaccine.**

The vaccine is made from an inactivated virus that can't transmit infection. People who get sick after receiving a flu vaccination might get sick anyway because it takes a week or two for the protective benefits from the vaccine to kick in. However, some people assume that because they got sick after getting the vaccine, the shot caused their illness. Yet, research has shown that this is not possible.

### **Myth #2: Healthy people don't need to be vaccinated.**

While it's especially important for people who have a chronic illness to get the flu vaccine, anyone — even healthy folks — can benefit from being vaccinated. Healthcare workers are routinely advised to get the flu vaccination in order to better protect their patients, as well as themselves. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone six months of age and older, including pregnant women, should get a flu vaccine every season with rare exception.<sup>1,2</sup>

### **Myth #3: Getting the flu vaccination is all you need to do to protect yourself from the flu.**

There are additional steps you can take to protect yourself during flu season besides vaccination. Avoid contact with people who have the flu and wash your hands frequently. If soap and water is not available readily, consider an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth after contact with people or surfaces you think may be exposed to the virus. Germs spread this way.

### **Myth #4: The flu is just a bad cold.**

Influenza may cause bad cold-like symptoms, such as a sore throat, runny nose, sneezing, hoarseness and a cough. In the U.S., the 2019-2020 flu season led to at least 18 million medical visits, 24,000 deaths and 410,000 hospitalizations.

### **Myth #5: You can't spread the flu if you're feeling well.**

Actually, 20 to 30 percent of people carrying the influenza virus have no symptoms.

### **Myth #6: You don't need to get a flu shot every year.**

The influenza virus changes (mutates) each year. Therefore, getting vaccinated each year is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure immunity to the most current strains most likely to cause an outbreak.<sup>2</sup>

**Myth #7: You can catch the flu from going out in cold weather without a coat or with wet hair or by sitting near a drafty window.**

The only way to catch the flu is by being exposed to the influenza virus. Flu season coincides with the cold weather, so people often associate the flu with cold, drafty environments. They happen at the same time, but it is not a cause-and-effect relationship.

**Myth #8: Feed a cold, starve a fever.**

If you have the flu or a cold and a fever, you need more fluids. There's little reason to increase or decrease how much you eat. Though you may have no appetite, "starving" yourself will accomplish little. In addition, poor nutrition will not help you get better.

**Myth #9: Chicken soup will speed your recovery from the flu.**

Hot liquids can soothe a sore throat and provide much needed fluids. However, chicken soup has no other proven specific qualities that can help fight the flu.

**Myth #10: If you have a high fever with the flu that lasts more than a day or two, antibiotics may be necessary.**

Antibiotics work well against bacteria, but they aren't effective for a viral infection like the flu. Then again, some people develop a bacterial infection as a complication of the flu, so it may be a good idea to be checked out by your doctor if your symptoms drag on or worsen.

Sources:

1. Harvard Health Publishing/Harvard Medical School. 10 Flu Myths: Dispelling Misinformation about the Flu Vaccine, Sickness, Treatment, and Recovery, October 1, 2020. Available from [www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu).
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Who Should and Who Should NOT Get a Flu Vaccine, August 25, 2022. Available from [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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