

## Flu Checklist

**Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by different strains of viruses. In the United States, there is a flu season that begins every fall and ends every spring. The type of flu people get during this season is called seasonal flu. Flu viruses spread from person to person when people who are infected cough or sneeze. Adults may be able to infect others 1 day before getting symptoms and as long as 5 days after getting sick.**

### Know the Difference

**Seasonal Flu**—A contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza (flu) viruses occurring every year. It affects an average of 5 percent to 20 percent of the U.S. population by causing mild to severe illness, and in some instances can lead to death.

**Epidemic**—The rapid spread of a disease that affects some or many people in a community or region at the same time.

**Pandemic**—An outbreak of a disease that affects large numbers of people throughout the world and spreads rapidly.

**H1N1 Influenza (swine flu)**—H1N1 influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that cause regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get H1N1 influenza, but human infections can and do happen. H1N1 influenza viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person.

**Avian Influenza**—Commonly known as bird flu, this strain of influenza virus is naturally occurring in birds. Wild birds can carry the virus and may not get sick from it; however, domestic birds may become infected by the virus and often die from it.

### What should I do to avoid getting sick?



**A flu vaccine is available in the U.S. every year. Get your flu shot as soon as it is available for the best chance of protection.**

- Always practice good health habits to maintain your body's resistance to infection.
  - Eat a balanced diet.
  - Drink plenty of fluids.
  - Exercise daily.
  - Manage stress.
  - Get enough rest and sleep.
- Take these common sense steps to stop the spread of germs:
  - Wash hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Avoid or minimize contact with sick people (a minimum three feet distancing is recommended).
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with tissues when you cough and sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
  - Stay away from others as much as possible when you are sick.
- Adopt business/school practices that encourage employees/students to stay home when sick.
- Get a flu shot every year. Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to minimize illness and death.

### Are you considered high risk for flu-related complications?

- The following groups of people are at an increased risk: people age 50 or older, pregnant women, people with chronic medical conditions, children age 6 months and older and people who live with or care for anyone at high risk.
- People at high risk should have their vaccinations updated every year and receive pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine if age 50 or older, as directed by their physician.

### Do I have the flu?



### Be aware of common flu symptoms:

- High fever
- Severe body aches
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea (more common in children than in adults)
- *NOTE: Having all of these symptoms doesn't always mean that you have the flu. Many different illnesses have similar symptoms.*

### Diagnosing the flu:

- It may be difficult to tell if you are suffering from the flu or another illness.
- Your health care provider may be able to tell you if you have the flu.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about possible complications, consult your health care provider.

### Potential risks and serious complications of the flu:

- Bacterial pneumonia
- Dehydration
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions
- Ear infections
- Sinus problems

### What should I do when someone is sick?



- Designate one person as the caregiver.
- Keep everyone's personal items separate. All household members should avoid sharing pens, papers, clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, food or eating utensils unless cleaned between uses.
- Disinfect doorknobs, switches, handles, computers, telephones, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched around the home or workplace.
- Wash everyone's dishes in the dishwasher or by hand using very hot water and soap.
- Wash everyone's clothes in a standard washing machine as you normally would. Use detergent and very hot water and wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
- Wear disposable gloves when in contact with or cleaning up body fluids.

### Terminology defined

**Immunity** to a disease is defined by the presence of antibodies to that disease in a person's system. Most people have some resistance to infections, either after they recover from an illness or through vaccination. Seasonal flu viruses change over time and immunity to them cannot be acquired unless vaccination is administered.

**Quarantine** is the physical separation of healthy people who have been exposed to an infectious disease from those who have not been exposed.

**Isolation** is a state of separation between persons or groups to prevent the spread of disease.

**Social distancing** is a practice imposed to limit face-to-face interaction in order to prevent exposure and transmission of a disease.

# Be Red Cross Ready

## Taking Care of People with the Flu

If you are caring for a loved one with the flu, it's important to take steps to protect yourself and others. The main way that flu viruses spread is from person-to-person in droplets of coughs and sneezes. Flu viruses may also be spread when a person touches droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands. To prevent spread it is important to remember hand washing and to cover your cough or sneeze.

Always follow the current advice of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and your local department of public health.

### Supplies to Keep on Hand

- Thermometer
- Soap
- Disposable gloves
- Acetaminophen
- Ibuprofen
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60-95% alcohol)
- Paper towels
- Tissues
- Facemasks and N95 respirators
- Bleach
- Disinfecting wipes
- Oral rehydration solution, or water, if unavailable

### Reducing the Spread of the Flu



- Get your flu shot(s) every year for the best chance of protection from the seasonal flu virus. Two shots will be needed for the 2009 flu season—one for seasonal flu and one for H1N1 flu.
- Take these common sense steps to reduce the spread of germs:
  - Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Avoid or minimize contact with people who are sick (a minimum six feet distancing is recommended).
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth to prevent germs from entering your body.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with tissues when you cough and sneeze. Put used tissues in a wastebasket and then wash your hands.
  - If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- Disinfect door knobs, switches, handles, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched. You can use a bleach solution that contains ¼ cup of bleach for every gallon of water. Mix new solution each time you clean. You may also choose to use a commercially-produced surface disinfectant.
- It is okay to wash everyone's dishes and clothes together. Use detergent and very hot water. Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.

### Taking Care of the Ill



- The person who is ill with the flu should stay in a room separate from common areas of the home and avoid contact with others as much as possible. The person should stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone without using fever-reducing medicines.
- Give fever-reducing medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Do NOT give aspirin to children or teens that have flu-like symptoms.
- Make sure the person who is ill receives lots of fluids and rest. Prevent dehydration by encouraging liquids at the first sign of the flu and follow these tips:
  - Give ice and easily digested foods such as soup and broth.
  - If the person has diarrhea or vomiting, give fluids that contain electrolytes. These are available at your pharmacy or grocery store and should be labeled 'oral rehydration solution,' which is different than sports drinks.
  - If drinking liquids makes nausea worse, give one sip at a time until the person can drink again.
- Persons ill with the flu should consider wearing a facemask, if available and tolerable, when they are sharing common spaces with other household members.
- Check with the person's health care provider initially about whether antiviral medication is recommended, or if fever persists, to determine if antibiotics are needed. Ensure all medications are taken as prescribed by their health care provider.
- Designate only one adult to be the caregiver. People at increased risk of severe illness from influenza should not be caregivers. If this is not possible, caregivers at increased risk should wear a facemask or N95 respirator.

### Taking Care of Yourself



- When parents and caregivers deal with crisis situations calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children and/or the people for whom they are caring.
- Taking care of someone else may cause you to lose sight of your own health or condition; remember to be mindful of your needs as well.
- Practice healthy habits to help maintain your body's resistance to infection, including:
  - Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
  - Drink plenty of water.
  - Exercise at least 3 times a week.
  - Manage stress.
  - Get enough sleep and rest.
- Caring for someone else, especially if they have a chronic condition can cause considerable stress. Common symptoms of stress include—
  - Sleep disturbances
  - Headaches
  - Muscle tension or aches
  - Changes in appetite
  - Skin problems
  - Anxiety
  - Depression, frustration and overreactions
- Dealing with stress:
  - Ask for help.
  - Make sure to express feelings to people you trust.
  - Get into a regular schedule including 7 to 8 hours of sleep, exercise and time to relax for yourself.
- For more information on dealing with stress and taking care of yourself or others contact your local Red Cross chapter or visit [RedCross.org](http://RedCross.org).

### Get medical care right away if the person who is sick:

- has difficulty breathing or chest pain;
- has purple or blue discoloration of the lips;
- is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down;
- has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry;
- has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions);
- is less responsive than normal or becomes confused.

### Stay Informed

It is important to stay informed about changes to guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC Web site ([www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu)) posts regular updates to public health recommendations regarding a number of public health threats, including H1N1 (swine flu). Your local public health department is also a reliable source for information.