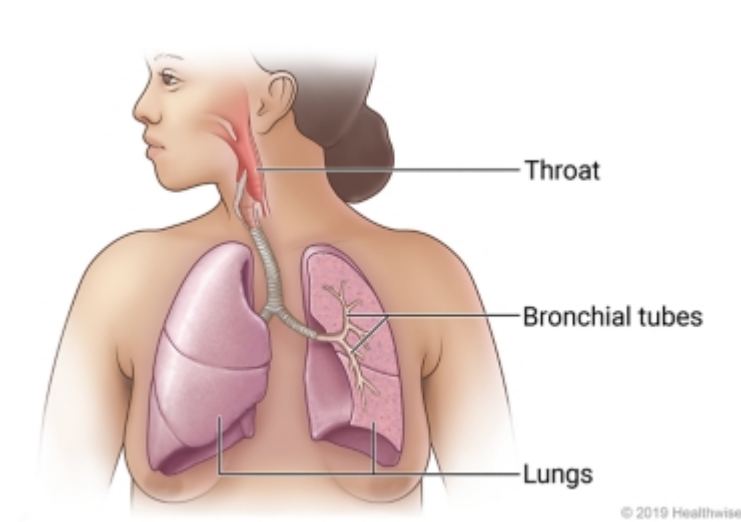


# Influenza (Flu): Care Instructions



## Overview

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Influenza (flu) is an infection in the lungs and breathing passages. It is caused by the influenza virus. There are different strains, or types, of the flu virus from year to year. Unlike the common cold, the flu comes on suddenly and the symptoms can be more severe. These symptoms include a cough, congestion, fever, chills, fatigue, aches, and pains. These symptoms may last for a few weeks. Although the flu can make you feel very sick, it usually doesn't cause serious health problems.

Home treatment is usually all you need for flu symptoms. But your doctor may prescribe antiviral medicine to prevent other health problems, such as pneumonia, from developing. The risk of other health problems from the flu is highest for young children (under 2), older adults (over 65), pregnant women, and people with long-term health conditions.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

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- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids. If you have to limit fluids because of a health problem, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- Take an over-the-counter pain medicine if needed, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve), to relieve fever, headache, and muscle aches. Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
- No one younger than 20 should take aspirin. It has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.
- Take any prescribed medicine exactly as directed.
- Do not smoke. Smoking can make the flu worse. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.

- If the skin around your nose and lips becomes sore, put some petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) on the area.
- To ease coughing:
  - Suck on cough drops or plain, hard candy.
  - Try an over-the-counter cough or cold medicine. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
  - Raise your head at night with an extra pillow. This may help you rest if coughing keeps you awake.

## To avoid spreading the flu

- Wash your hands regularly, and keep your hands away from your face.
- Stay home from school, work, and other public places until you are feeling better and your fever has been gone for at least 24 hours. The fever needs to have gone away on its own without the help of medicine.
- Ask people living with you to talk to their doctors about preventing the flu. They may get antiviral medicine to keep from getting the flu from you.
- To prevent the flu in the future, get the flu vaccine every fall. Encourage people living with you to get the vaccine.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. If you can, cough or sneeze into the bend of your elbow, not your hands.

## When should you call for help?

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**Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have severe trouble breathing.
- You have a seizure.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have trouble breathing.
- You have a fever with a stiff neck or a severe headache.
- You have pain or pressure in your chest or belly.
- You have a fever or cough that returns after getting better.
- You feel very sleepy, dizzy, or confused.
- You are not urinating.
- You have severe muscle pain.
- You have severe weakness, or you are unsteady.
- You have medical conditions that are getting worse.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.
- You are having a problem with your medicine.

## Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **L652** in the search box to learn more about "**Influenza (Flu): Care Instructions**".

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