



# Dear Influenza, you make me sick

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The flu is here. Illinois is now reported to have widespread outbreaks of Influenza. Typically this viral illness strikes as early as October and can last well in to the spring. We are now getting into peak flu season and thus, it warrants a review on what to do you if you get -or you think you have- the flu.

Influenza has two types, A and B. Both can make you feel very ill with cough and runny nose, fever, malaise and fatigue, and body aches. Although people with the flu may also have nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, this by itself is probably not Influenza. The so-called "stomach flu" is from another set of viruses and there is no vaccine to prevent it. Influenza is more of a respiratory illness and usually is spread with droplets when one sneezes or coughs. You can spread the virus as early as a day before symptoms start and can be contagious for about 5-7 days after you start feeling sick.

There are three main prongs to flu talk:

1. Get the Influenza vaccine
2. Wash your hands
3. See your doctor if you think you have it

Healthcare providers can't stress enough the importance of getting a flu shot. The vaccine has been tried and tested true to help prevent the illness. This season there seems to be a mutation in the strain and so the match between the flu vaccine and the strains causing influenza is not as close as years' past. However, getting the flu shot still allows one's body system to develop antibodies that can protect against other viruses and if you do you get the flu, it will likely be less severe than if you didn't receive the shot. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to recommend Influenza vaccination for everyone 6 months and older.

If you don't like needles, there is a nasal spray vaccine approved for those aged 2 through 49.

To avoid the spread of flu, it is also important to stay away from sick people and stay home if you are sick. Be sure to use soap and water to wash your hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. It may help to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

Although not a cure, antiviral medicines such as Tamiflu can lessen the severity and shorten the course of the illness, but that medicine is most efficacious if started in the first 30 hours, approximately, of symptom onset. Most people with the flu recover in about seven days. However complications such as pneumonia, ear and sinus infections, dehydration, as well as worsening of chronic diseases such as congestive heart failure, diabetes, and asthma can ensue.

General measures for the malady are:

\* Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and NSAIDs such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naprosyn (Aleve) are helpful with the body aches and fever

\* Fluids to maintain hydration, such as clear sodapop, Pedialyte, broth

\* Humidifier

\* In some adults, cough syrups such as guaifenesin/dextromethorphan (Robitussin DM) can be used to help with cough suppression and expectoration

\* Most people rest while they are most ill, however normal activity can be resumed once you are feeling up to it (as tolerated)

For more information, see the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm)

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***The health information provided herein is not intended to replace the advice or discussion with a healthcare provider and is for educational purposes only. Before making any decisions regarding your health, speak with your healthcare provider.***