

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

INFLUENZA (“THE FLU”)



Influenza is a contagious infection caused by the influenza virus which affects the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild, moderate, or severe sickness. In the United States, millions of people are infected, thousands are hospitalized, and thousands die of flu-related complications each year. The most important way to prevent yourself from getting the flu and your community is to get the vaccine each year. Flu season generally peaks November-March but starts sooner and can end later. Initially the flu may seem like a common cold. However, the flu has a much faster onset and usually you feel much worse with the flu.

DIAGNOSIS

Often based on symptoms. Otherwise, a flu test can be done, using a small q-tip to sample mucus from the back of the nose.

TREATMENT

Most people will recover on their own in a few days to less than 2 weeks, but some people can develop serious complications such as pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections, or dehydration. The flu can also worsen chronic conditions such as causing an asthma attack if you have asthma. Anti-viral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) are used in people who are diagnosed early in the infection, are very sick from the flu or those at high risk of complications. People at serious risk of complications include those with chronic health conditions such as significant asthma, diabetes, heart disease, those on immunosuppressive medications, pregnant women, those over 65, and young children. For those who are otherwise healthy, you can discuss anti-viral medications with your provider, but oftentimes people choose not to use anti-viral medications and let the flu run its course.

FOR RELIEF OF SYMPTOMS

- Stop smoking and avoid cigarette exposure
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Avoid alcohol
- Use a humidifier
- Stay home when you're sick

CONGESTION	Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed), Phenylephrine Saline Nasal Spray, Nasal Irrigation (Neti Pot)
PAIN, HEADACHE, FEVER	Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
COUGH	Mucus-thinners (Mucinex), Decongestants (Sudafed)
SORE THROAT	Cough drops/throat lozenges

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org <https://familydoctor.org/is-it-a-cold-or-the-flu/>

Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/flu/symptoms-causes/syc-20351719>

CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

SYMPTOMS

- Fever (>100.4°F), chills, sweats
- Headache, muscle aches, fatigue
- Dry persistent cough
- Nasal congestion, sore throat
- Less common: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

RISK FACTORS

- Crowded environments such as the university setting, dorm life
- Weakened immune system
- Chronic illness like asthma or diabetes
- Pregnancy
- Unvaccinated

PREVENTION

- Get the flu shot by the end of October, available at Student Health
- Eat healthy foods, exercise, get adequate sleep
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wash hands frequently with soap, avoid touching eyes/mouth, cough/sneeze into your elbow
- Clean common surfaces such as counters and doorknobs with antibacterial disinfectant