

Cold & Flu Season Toolkit

This month, as the weather gets colder and the days get shorter, we're highlighting preparedness tips for navigating cold and flu season. For most of us, this means extra sniffles and a cough, but for others, viruses like the flu can be serious business. Influenza causes hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations each year. Why risk it? This toolkit gives you tips on how to stay healthy during cold and flu season.

Mitigation is a key to staying healthy during cold and flu season. Things like sneezing and coughing into our sleeves or staying home when we're sick are tried and true methods of stopping the spread of germs. But what about making changes to our lifestyle? This toolkit also covers tips on healthy eating, exercise, sleep, and quitting smoking. Doing one or all these things can significantly limit the effects that colds and flu can have on us, as those with chronic illness, like obesity and respiratory disease, have more adverse effects from these viruses.

In addition to the tips contained in this toolkit, we want to encourage everyone to stay up to date with [COVID-19 vaccines](#). COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and free. Everyone 6 months and older can get an updated COVID-19 vaccine, and [as of September 25th, the federal government will send up to 4 free COVID-19 tests per household](#).

A special shout out to our federal partners who, without their expertise, this toolkit would not exist (we're not doctors, after all). Thank you to the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov), the National Institutes for Health (www.nih.gov), Health and Human Services (www.hhs.gov), and Health.gov (www.health.gov).

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Common Colds

Key Messages

- Sore throat and runny nose are usually the first signs of a cold, followed by coughing and sneezing.
- Most people recover in about 7-10 days.
- You can help reduce your risk of getting a cold: wash your hands often, avoid close contact with sick people, and don't touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Common colds are the main reason that children miss school and adults miss work.
- Each year in the United States, there are millions of cases of the common cold. Adults have an average of 2-3 colds per year, and children have even more.

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Talking Points

What is a “cold”?

- Common colds, or simply “colds,” are usually quite harmless and go away again on their own. The symptoms of a cold such as a cough, sore throat and a runny nose can be really annoying.
- A severe cold can make you feel weak and ill.
- Occasionally, colds are mistaken for the flu. But flu symptoms are usually much worse.
- A flu doesn't develop gradually. Instead, it generally starts very suddenly with a high fever, chills, and aching muscles and joints.
- Colds can be caused by various viruses. They lead to inflammations in the lining of the nose and throat but are otherwise harmless.

Cold Symptoms

- Most people get colds in the winter and spring, but it is possible to get a cold any time of the year. Symptoms usually include:
 - sore throat
 - runny nose
 - coughing
 - sneezing
 - headaches
 - body aches

Cold Treatment

- There is no cure for a cold. To feel better, you should get lots of rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Over-the-counter medicines may help ease symptoms but will not make your cold go away any faster. Always read the label and use medications as directed.
- Antibiotics will not help you recover from a cold caused by a respiratory virus. They do not work against viruses, and they may make it harder for your body to fight future bacterial infections if you take them unnecessarily.
- When people are ill, they typically see their family doctor.

Cold Prevention

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Wash them for 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-

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based hand sanitizer. Viruses that cause colds can live on your hands, and regular handwashing can help protect you from getting sick.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Viruses that cause colds can enter your body this way and make you sick.
- Stay away from people who are sick. Sick people can spread viruses that cause the common cold through close contact with others.

Protect Others

- Stay at home and keep children out of school or daycare while sick.
- Avoid close contact with others, such as hugging, kissing, or shaking hands.
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue, then throw it away, or cough and sneeze into your upper shirt sleeve, completely covering your mouth and nose. Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose. Move away from people before coughing or sneezing.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as toys, doorknobs, and mobile devices.
- There is no vaccine to protect you against the common cold.

Sources: [Common Colds: Protect Yourself and Others | Features | CDC](#); [Common colds: Overview - InformedHealth.org - NCBI Bookshelf \(nih.gov\)](#); [Common Colds: Protect Yourself and Others | Features | CDC](#); [Common colds: Overview - InformedHealth.org - NCBI Bookshelf \(nih.gov\)](#); [Common Colds: Protect Yourself and Others | Features | CDC](#); [About Flu | CDC](#)

The Flu

Key Messages

- Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs.
- Some people, such as people 65 years and older, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at higher risk of serious flu complications.
- There are two main types of influenza (flu) viruses: types A and B. The influenza A and B viruses that routinely spread in people (human influenza viruses) are responsible for seasonal flu epidemics each year.
- The best way to reduce the risk of flu and its potentially serious complications is by getting vaccinated each year.

Talking Points

What is the “flu”?

- Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs.
- It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.
- The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

Flu Symptoms

- Influenza (flu) can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.
- Flu symptoms usually come on suddenly.
- People who have flu often feel some, or all, of these symptoms:
 - fever or feeling feverish/chills (not everyone with the flu will have a fever)
 - cough
 - sore throat
 - runny or stuffy nose
 - muscle or body aches
 - headaches
 - fatigue (tiredness)
 - some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

Flu Treatment

If you get sick:

- Take Antiviral Drugs, if prescribed by a health care provider
- Take everyday precautions to protect others while sick
- Stay home until you are better
 - If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

Flu Prevention

- The best way to reduce your risk from seasonal flu and its potentially serious complications is to get vaccinated every year.

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- Follow the same preventative measures and actions as you would with the common cold, like sneezing into your sleeve, avoiding contact with those that are sick, cleaning and disinfecting, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home if you're sick. Stop the spread.

Flu Vaccine Misconceptions

- **Flu vaccines cannot cause flu illness.** Flu vaccines given with a needle (i.e., flu shots) are made with either inactivated (killed) viruses, or with only a single protein from the flu virus. The nasal spray vaccine contains live viruses that are attenuated (weakened) so that they will not cause illness.
- **Do I really need a flu vaccine every year?** Yes. CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older with rare exception. The reason for this is that a person's immune protection from vaccination declines over time, so an annual vaccination is needed to get the "optimal" or best protection against the flu. Additionally, flu viruses are constantly changing, so the vaccine composition is reviewed each year and updated as needed.
- **What about people who get a seasonal flu vaccine and still get sick with flu symptoms?** There are several reasons why someone might get flu symptoms even after they have been vaccinated against flu.
 - o Someone can get sick with another respiratory virus besides flu, such as rhinoviruses or SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19). Other respiratory viruses can cause symptoms similar to flu, and they can also spread and cause illness during flu season. Flu vaccines only protect against flu and its complications, not other illnesses.
 - o Someone can be exposed to flu viruses shortly before getting vaccinated or during the two-week period after vaccination that it takes the body to develop immune protection. This exposure may result in a person becoming sick with flu before protection from vaccination takes effect.
 - o Flu vaccines vary in how well they work, and someone can get vaccinated but still get sick with flu. There are many different flu viruses that spread and cause illness among people, so this can happen if someone is exposed to a flu virus that is very different from the viruses in the flu vaccine. The ability of a flu vaccine to protect a person depends partially on the similarity or "match" between the vaccine viruses chosen to make the vaccine and those spreading and causing illness. Even when that happens though, flu vaccination can still reduce severity of illness.

Sources: [Key Facts About Influenza \(Flu\) | CDC](#); [Treatment: What You Need to Know | CDC](#); [Misconceptions about Seasonal Flu and Flu Vaccines | CDC](#)

Healthy Living

Key Messages

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- Practicing healthy living habits won't prevent you from getting sick, but it can shorten the duration and severity of illness.
- Regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your body. It has several health benefits.
- Although the amount of sleep you get each day is important, other aspects of your sleep also contribute to your health and well-being. Good sleep quality is also essential to staying healthy.
- It's never too late to quit smoking. Quitting smoking now improves your health and reduces your risk of heart disease, cancer, lung disease, and other smoking-related illnesses.
- A healthy diet fulfills nutritional requirements your body needs to stay healthy.

Talking Points

Healthy Eating

- An eating plan that helps manage your weight includes a variety of healthy foods.
- Add an array of colors to your plate and think of it as eating the rainbow.
- Dark, leafy greens, oranges, and tomatoes—even fresh herbs—are loaded with vitamins, fiber, and minerals.
- Adding frozen peppers, broccoli, or onions to stews and omelets gives them a quick and convenient boost of color and nutrients.

Physical Exercise

- Physical exercise, even for just 30 minutes a day, has many benefits including:
 - Helps control your weight
 - Reduces risk of cardiovascular (heart and blood flow) disease
 - Lowers blood pressure and improves cholesterol
 - Reduces risk of type 2 diabetes (high blood sugar)
 - Reduces risk of [metabolic syndrome](#)
 - Reduces risk of colon and breast cancer, and possibly other types of cancer
 - Strengthens bones and muscles
 - Improves mental health and mood
 - Improves your ability to do daily activities
 - Prevents falls
 - Increases your chances of living longer
- Before starting any fitness program, you may want to speak with your doctor. This is especially important if you have a chronic, long-term disease such as:
 - A heart condition,
 - Arthritis (joint pain),
 - Diabetes (high blood sugar), or

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- o High blood pressure.
- Your doctor can help you figure out what types and amounts of exercise are right for you.

Tobacco Use

- It's never too late to quit smoking. Quitting smoking now improves your health and reduces your risk of heart disease, cancer, lung disease, and other smoking-related illnesses.
- Build a "Quit Plan" that addresses the following:
 - o Pick a quit date
 - o Let loved ones know you are quitting
 - o Remove reminders of smoking
 - o Identify your reasons to quit smoking
 - o Identify your smoking triggers
 - o Develop coping strategies
 - o Have places you can turn to for immediate help
 - o Set up rewards and milestones
- The National Texting Portal connects adults (18 years of age and older) in the United States with mobile text message-based support to help them quit smoking. Text QUITNOW to 333888.
- Try calling a Quitline! You can talk to a quit smoking coach by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW

Source: www.cdc.gov

Social Media

Common Hashtags

- o #FightFlu
- o #FluVaccine
- o #stopthespread
- o #MoveYourWay
- o #GreatAmericanSmokeout

Sample Posts

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- Every year #flu puts hundreds of thousands of people in the hospital. A flu vaccine gives you extra protection to #FightFlu. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about getting a flu vaccine. Learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccinations.htm>
- Everyone 6 months and older should get a #flu vaccine every season. Flu vaccine can reduce flu illnesses, doctors' visits, hospitalizations and has been shown to be life-saving. #FightFlu and get vaccinated today! Learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccinations.htm>
- A 2018 study showed that among adults hospitalized with #flu, vaccinated patients were 59% less likely to be admitted to the ICU than those who had not been vaccinated. Protect yourself and your loved ones by getting vaccinated. More: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm>
- New CDC study found children ages 6 mos.-17 yrs. who had gotten #fluvaccine were half as likely to end up in the emergency department from flu than those who had not been vaccinated. Learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm>
- Flu can make chronic health problems worse. #Fluvaccine is the best protection from #flu and its potentially serious complications. Find out what groups of people are at high risk for complications: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/index.htm>
- DYK? #Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk and can spread to others up to 6 feet away. Learn more about how flu spreads: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/spread.htm>
- The best way to prevent flu is to get vaccinated, but healthy habits like covering your cough and washing your hands often can help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like flu. Learn more about how healthy habits help prevent flu: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/spread.htm>
- Flu vaccine is the best way to protect your child and family from potentially serious complications from flu. A new CDC study finds that among children ages 6 months through 17 years, flu vaccination reduced risk of being hospitalized for flu by 41% and risk of having a flu-related emergency department visit by half during the 2018-19 flu season. Schedule an appointment for your child's flu vaccine today. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm>
- Small #food swaps can make your meals and snacks healthier. Look for ways throughout the day to add more #fruits and #vegetables to your plate. <http://bit.ly/2iPRnGM> 
- What's the best way to get active? Whatever gets you moving! Check out @HealthGov's #PhysicalActivity resources and get ready to #MoveYourWay: <https://bit.ly/2qzZljq>

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- DYK? Physical activity can help you sleep better, focus better, and feel better! Learn more about the benefits with @HealthGov's #MoveYourWay resources based on the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: <https://bit.ly/2qzZlJq>
- November 16 is the #GreatAmericanSmokeout, a time to encourage people to quit smoking. Help #tobacco users quit with this @MillionHeartsUS action guide. <http://bit.ly/2a21xTr>
- Smoking increases risk for heart disease and stroke. Help your patients quit #tobacco for good with these @MillionHeartsUS tools. <https://millionhearts.hhs.gov/> #GreatAmericanSmokeout

Sources: www.cdc.gov; www.health.gov; www.millionhearts.hhs.gov/

Graphics

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The main differences

between COVID-19, a cold, the flu and hay fever:

Symptoms	COVID-19	Cold	Flu	Hay fever
Fever	●●●●	●	●●●●	● ³
Tiredness	●●	●●	●●●●	●●
Cough	●●●● ¹	●●●	●●●● ¹	●●
Sneezing	-	●●●●	-	●●●●
Joint pain	●●	●●	●●●●	-
Runny nose	●	●●●●	●●	●●●●
Sore throat	●●	●●●●	●●	● ⁴
Diarrhea	●	-	●● ²	-
Headache	●●	●●	●●●●	●
Shortness of breath	●●	-	-	●● ⁵
Itchy eyes	-	-	-	●●●
Impaired sense of smell and/or taste	●●	●	●	-

Symptoms		¹ – Dry cough ⁴ – Burning / itching ² – In children ⁵ – Allergic asthma ³ – Mild fever
Typical	●●●●	
Frequent	●●●	
Occasional	●●	
Rare	●	

Based on: German Federal Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians [in German: Kassenärztliche Bundesvereinigung] Robert Koch Institute's information on COVID-19

GET YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY VACCINATED!

A yearly flu vaccine is the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.

#FIGHT FLU

FLU FACT

People with chronic conditions such as heart disease, asthma, or diabetes are at a greater risk for developing serious flu complications.

#FIGHT FLU

STOP THE SPREAD

Take everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of flu viruses!

#FIGHT FLU

MOVE YOUR WAY. Adults need a mix of physical activity to stay healthy.

Moderate-intensity aerobic activity*
Anything that gets your heart beating faster counts.

at least **150 minutes a week**

AND

Muscle-strengthening activity
Do activities that make your muscles work harder than usual.

at least **2 days a week**

If you prefer vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (like running), aim for at least **75 minutes a week**.
If that's more than you can do right now, **do what you can**. Even 5 minutes of physical activity has real health benefits.

Walk. Run. Dance. Play. **What's your move?**

MOVE YOUR WAY. How much physical activity do kids and teens need?

At least 60 minutes every day.

Most of that time can be moderate-intensity aerobic activity — anything that gets their heart beating faster counts.

And at least 3 days a week, encourage them to step it up to **vigorous-intensity aerobic activity**, so they're breathing fast and their heart is pounding.

As part of their daily 60 minutes, kids and teens also need:

Muscle-strengthening activity
at least 3 days a week

Anything that makes their muscles work harder counts — like climbing or swinging on the monkey bars.

AND

Bone-strengthening activity
at least 3 days a week

Bones need pressure to get stronger. Running, jumping, and other weight-bearing activities all count.

Walk. Run. Dance. Play. **What's your move?**

More than **16 million Americans** live with a smoking-related disease.

You don't have to be one of them. **YOU CAN QUIT!**

Learn more at [CDC.gov/tobacco/features](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/features)

CDC.gov/quit