

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. The best way to prevent the flu is by **getting vaccinated each year**. You may have the flu if you have some of these symptoms:

- fever (not everyone has fever)
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- body aches
- headache
- chills
- fatigue
- sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

**Complications of Flu** - Most people who get influenza will recover in a few days to less than 2 weeks, but some people will develop complications as a result of the flu, some of which can be life-threatening and result in death. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are three examples of complications from flu. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu.

### **Emergency Warning Signs -**

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash
- Being unable to eat
- Has no tears when crying
- Significantly fewer wet diapers than normal
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

**What is the difference between cold and flu?** The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two illnesses have similar flu-like symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms like fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

**Are there medicines to treat the flu?** Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu in your body. While CDC recommends flu vaccine as the first and most important step in preventing flu, antiviral drugs are a second line of defense against the flu. Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter and are different from antibiotics. You can only get them if you have a prescription from your doctor. There are two antiviral drugs recommended by CDC this season. The brand names for these are Tamiflu® and Relenza®. Most healthy people with flu, however, do not need to be treated with antiviral drugs.

**What are the benefits of antiviral drugs?** These drugs can make you feel better and shorten the time you are sick by 1-2 days. They can prevent serious complications.

**When should antiviral drugs be taken for treatment?** Studies have shown that flu antiviral drugs work best for treatment if they are started within 2 days of getting sick. There may still be benefit in treating people with antiviral drugs even after two days have gone by, especially if the sick person has a greater chance of serious flu complications or if the person has certain symptoms (such as shortness of breath, chest pain/pressure, dizziness, or confusion) or is in the hospital because of the flu.

**How long should antiviral drugs be taken?** To treat flu, Tamiflu® and Relenza® are usually taken for 5 days, although people hospitalized with flu may need longer.

**Can children take antiviral drugs?** Yes. Children can take antiviral drugs.

- Tamiflu is FDA-approved for use in children 1 year of age or older. Tamiflu can come in liquid for children or in capsules. If your doctor prescribes Tamiflu capsules for your child and they cannot swallow capsules, you can **open the capsule and mix the contents** with regular or sugar-free chocolate syrup and give that mixture to your child. Tamiflu has been in use since 1999. The most common side effects are nausea or vomiting which usually happen in the first 2 days of treatment. Taking Tamiflu with food can reduce the chance of getting these side effects.
- Relenza is FDA-approved for treatment in children 7 years of age and older, but only for people without breathing problems (such as asthma) or heart disease. It is an inhaled powder that comes in a disk inhaler. Relenza has been in use since 1999. The most common side effects are dizziness, sinusitis, runny or stuffy nose, cough, diarrhea, nausea, or headache. Relenza may also cause wheezing and trouble breathing in people with lung disease. Confusion and abnormal behavior leading to injury has been observed rarely in people with the flu, mostly children, who were treated with Tamiflu or Relenza. Flu can also cause these behaviors. But persons taking these drugs should be closely monitored for signs of unusual behavior or problems thinking clearly. This behavior should be immediately reported to a health care provider.

**How long should my child stay home?** CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol. You should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.