

# Family Health Watch

## RECOGNIZING THE FLU

Influenza, or flu, is a respiratory infection. The most familiar aspect of the flu is the way it can “knock you off your feet” as it sweeps through entire communities.

The flu differs in several ways from the common cold, a respiratory infection also caused by viruses. For example, people with colds rarely get fevers or headaches or suffer from the extreme exhaustion that flu viruses cause.

Flu outbreaks usually begin suddenly and occur mainly in the late fall and winter. The disease spreads through communities creating an epidemic. Since schools are an excellent place for flu viruses to attack and spread, families with school-age children have more infections than other families, with an average of one-third of family members infected each year.

### SYMPTOMS

If you get infected by the flu virus, you will usually feel symptoms one to four days later. The symptoms start very quickly and may include:

- Body aches
- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Stuffy nose

### TRANSMISSION

You can get the flu if someone around you who has the flu coughs or sneezes. You can get the flu simply by touching a surface like a telephone or doorknob that has been contaminated by a touch from someone who has the flu. The viruses can pass through the air and enter your body through your nose or mouth. If you've touched a contaminated surface, they can pass from your hand to your nose or mouth. You are at greatest risk of getting infected in highly populated areas, such as in crowded living conditions and in schools.

## COMMON SENSE WAYS TO STAY HEALTHY

Your chances of avoiding the flu are better when you:

- Keep your distance from people with the flu.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue, or your arm, when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Don't touch your eyes or mouth where germs can spread.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle, including a good diet, adequate sleep, low stress, and lots of water to drink.
- Get an annual flu shot.
- Teach healthy habits at home.

## MORE INFORMATION

Get Informed about the flu. Visit any of these online resources:

**Flu Tracker**  
[www.flufacts.com](http://www.flufacts.com)

**National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases**  
[www.niaid.nih.gov/news/focuson/flu](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/news/focuson/flu)

**National Library of Medicine**  
1-888-FIND-NLM (1-888-346-3656) or 301-594-5983  
[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or 404-639-3534  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Food and Drug Administration**  
1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332)  
[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

**The American Lung Association**  
212-315-8700  
[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

**National Foundation for Infectious Diseases**  
**National Coalition for Adult Immunization**  
301-656-0003  
[www.nfid.org/library/influenza](http://www.nfid.org/library/influenza)  
[www.nfid.org/ncai](http://www.nfid.org/ncai)

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