



People With Asthma Need to Take Precautions to Avoid the Flu

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness. It can also cause death in severe cases. The flu can affect your lungs when you have asthma. It can cause inflammation (swelling) and narrowing of your airways. These changes could trigger asthma symptoms, an asthma episode, or an asthma attack. If you have asthma, defending yourself against the flu is very important.

Many people recover from the flu without problems. But having asthma puts you at risk of serious health problems from the flu.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) has advice for fighting the flu if you have asthma.



Get the flu vaccine every year. The flu spreads from fall through spring. People who are 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine.



Make it a family affair. Have family members without asthma get the flu vaccine to protect people who do have asthma.



Prevent exposure. The flu can be very contagious. Properly wash your hands often, don't touch your face, and don't share food or utensils. If possible, avoid people who are sick. Wearing a mask may help prevent exposure when you are in close contact with someone who is ill.



Talk with your doctor. Update your Asthma Action Plan with your doctor so that you know what to do if you get sick.



If you get sick with flu symptoms, call your doctor immediately. People with asthma can quickly become sicker with the flu. Your doctor may recommend treatment with an antiviral medicine or a change to your regular asthma treatment.

Common Flu Symptoms

The flu usually starts suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever (often very high, 101 or above)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness, chills
- Constant cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches in bones and/or muscles

Diarrhea and vomiting can occur, but are more common in children. These symptoms are referred to as “flu-like symptoms.” Symptoms from other illnesses like COVID-19, the common cold, allergies, or asthma can be similar to the flu and may be confusing. COVID-19 testing is widely available, but you may need a clinic appointment to get tested for the flu. Visit or talk with your doctor to get a proper diagnosis.



Emergency Symptoms of the Flu

Seek emergency medical help right away if you show these signs:

In children:

- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- Cyanosis which is tissue color changes on mucus membranes (like tongue, lips, and around the eyes) and fingertips or nail beds – the color appears grayish or whitish on darker skin tones and bluish on lighter skin tones
- Not waking up or not being conscious
- Being irritable and difficult to comfort
- Flu-like symptoms seem to improve but return with worse fever and cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults:

- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- Pain in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Who Should Get the Flu Vaccine?

- People who are 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every year.
- If you have an egg allergy, you can safely get a flu shot. This is true no matter how severe your egg allergy was in the past. This includes a severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis [ana-fih-LACK-sis] to egg.

Should I Get the Flu Shot or Nasal Spray?

- People who are 6 months to 4 years old should get a flu shot.
- People who are 4 to 49 with well-controlled asthma and no asthma symptoms can get the flu shot or nasal spray.
- People who are 4 to 49 with recent asthma episodes or wheezing should get the flu shot.
- People who are 50 and older should get the flu shot whether they have asthma or not.

Who Should Not Get the Flu Vaccine?

- Children younger than 6 months of age are too young to get a flu shot.
- If you have severe, life-threatening allergies to any ingredient in a flu vaccine (other than egg proteins), you should not get the shot.
- If you have a latex allergy or have had a reaction to a previous flu shot, talk with your doctor before getting a flu shot.

You can spread the flu before you even know you're sick.

Unlike asthma, the flu is contagious. The flu spreads from coughing and sneezing. It usually spreads from person to person. You can also get the flu by touching something with the flu virus on it, then touching your mouth or nose. *This is why preventing the flu by getting a flu vaccine is important.*