



Cold and flu prevention

You know the symptoms – a runny nose, sneezing and a scratchy throat. Are you getting the dreaded cold? But what if you also have a fever, aches and chills? Then, you might have the flu.

Whether it's the cold or flu, getting sick is never fun. Adults average two to four colds each year and children catch between six and eight.¹

Wouldn't it be better if you could avoid a cold or the flu in the first place? You can take simple steps to decrease your chances of getting sick. For example, just a little extra handwashing can save you a week or longer of sniffing, shivering misery. See *Washing your hands like a pro* for some tips.

To avoid the flu, getting a flu shot can be your best bet. For more information, check out *Remember to get your flu shot!*

Remember to get your flu shot!

The best way to protect yourself against the flu is to get vaccinated each year. Vaccine experts now recommend that everyone six months and older get a flu shot. This is especially important if you live with or care for people at high risk for developing the flu, such as children younger than five, those who are 50 years of age or older and those with certain chronic medical conditions.⁴

There are two types of vaccines:

- The “flu shot” is given with a needle and approved for people older than six months, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine is approved for healthy people 2 to 49 years old who are not pregnant.

Yearly flu vaccinations should begin in September or as soon as vaccine is available.⁴

There are some people who should not get a flu vaccine without first checking with their doctor. This includes children younger than six months of age and those who have:

- A severe allergy to chicken eggs
- Had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination
- Developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of getting an influenza vaccine
- A moderate-to-severe illness with a fever (they should wait until they recover to get vaccinated)⁴

Prevention

While it's nearly impossible to completely avoid cold or flu viruses, prevention is simple. Here are some tips:

- **Clean shared surfaces** like telephones, keyboards, steering wheels and doorknobs often.
- **Make sleep a priority.** Your body's immune system does its best work while you're sleeping. Lack of sleep can reduce the effectiveness of your immune system and make you vulnerable to infection.²
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol and caffeine, which can be dehydrating.³

Treatment

You can combat much of the discomfort from colds and flu with over-the-counter medications. However, be sure that you know what ingredients are in all the drugs you're taking to avoid taking too much. Also, check with your doctor before taking any medication if you're pregnant, breastfeeding, on another prescription drug or being treated for an ongoing health condition. Antibiotics aren't effective in treating viral infections like a cold or influenza, although your doctor may prescribe them if you develop a secondary infection like sinusitis or pneumonia⁴.

Currently, no antiviral medications are available to treat the common cold¹, but several have been approved for treating the flu in people who haven't been vaccinated⁶. Get plenty of rest, and don't go back to your normal activity level until you feel up to it.



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Washing your hands like a pro

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, handwashing is the most important way to prevent the transmission of disease.⁵ Wash your hands after touching someone who is ill or after touching an object they've touched. Also, remember to keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth unless you've washed your hands.

Here are some guidelines on how to most effectively wash your hands:

1. Use lots of warm, running water and liquid soap to lather your hands and wrists. Avoid bar soap, which can harbor viruses and bacteria. Scrub for at least 15 seconds.
2. Rinse with your hands pointing down so the rinse water doesn't run up your arms.
3. Dry with a disposable paper towel – germs can live for hours on hand towels.
4. Shut off the faucet using the paper towel as a barrier so you don't have to touch the handle.
5. Use a lotion or moisturizing cream to prevent cracks in the skin that can provide an entry point for germs and bacteria.

Sources

¹American Lung Association, *Facts About the Common Cold* (Accessed September 2010): [lungusa.org](https://www.lungusa.org)

²WebMD, *Use Your Immune System to Prevent Flu* (September 25, 2009): [webmd.com](https://www.webmd.com)

³WebMD, *11 Natural Tips to Prevent a Cold* (February 21, 2010): [webmd.com](https://www.webmd.com)

⁴Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine* (July 2010): [cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm)

⁵Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Handwashing: Hand Hygiene Saves Lives* (June 2, 2010): [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

⁶American Lung Association, *Cold and Flu Guidelines* (Accessed September 2010): [lungusa.org](https://www.lungusa.org)

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