

Flu and Pneumonia

Care Provider Bulletin

Feb. 2017



What are the flu and pneumonia?

- The **flu** is a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses. It is different from a cold. It usually comes on suddenly.
- **Pneumonia** is an infection of the lungs that can cause mild to severe illness in people of all ages. It can be caused by viruses, bacteria, and fungi.

Did you Know?

- In the United States, approximately 20,000 people die every year from the flu, and 50,000 die from pneumonia.
- Most people who get the flu will recover in less than 2 weeks. For others, flu complications (such as pneumonia) can result in hospitalizations and death.
- Pneumonia is often the final illness in people who have other serious, chronic diseases.

Flu Symptoms

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Vomiting and diarrhea (less common)

Possible Complications

- Respiratory failure requiring a breathing machine or ventilator
- Sepsis, which may lead to widespread organ failure
- Lung abscesses, possibly requiring surgery



Who is at Increased Risk of Flu Complications

- Children younger than 5, but especially younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years and older
- Pregnant women
- People living in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People with certain medical conditions including neurological or neurodevelopmental conditions (seizure disorders, cerebral palsy, developmental disabilities), heart disease, weakened immune systems, kidney disorders, liver disorders, and others

Who is at Increased Risk of Pneumonia Complications?

- People who have had a recent viral respiratory infection
- People who have difficulty swallowing
- People with chronic lung diseases
- People with cerebral palsy
- People who have had recent surgery or trauma
- People who smoke
- People who have underlying medical conditions such as diabetes or heart disease

Prevention

Flu Shots and Vaccines

- The best tool for preventing the flu is the flu vaccine, and the best time to get a flu shot is from early October to mid-November. However, the flu shot can be given at any point during the flu season, even if the virus has already begun to spread in your community.
- Flu shots are needed yearly because the virus is constantly changing and new vaccines are developed annually to protect against new strains.
- Doctor approval may be needed for flu shots for individuals who are ill, have a history of Guillan-Barre Syndrome, pregnant, or have severe allergies.
- Different vaccines can help protect against the flu and should be discussed with a doctor (Pneumococcal, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), Pertussis (whooping cough), Varicella (chickenpox), Measles, Influenza (flu).

General Precautions

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When caretaking is needed, avoid close contact near the face if the individual is coughing.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after a fever if possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw it out and wash your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be used if washing is not an option.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect often when individuals are sick.
- Limit contact with cigarette smoke.
- Take good care of medical issues.

Treatment

- Physical exams are necessary in people who are at higher risk of complications and may include chest x-rays, blood work, and other tests.
- Anti-viral drugs may be prescribed for individuals who have the flu. These medications help shorten the duration and intensity of the flu and may be life-saving for individuals who are at high risk. These medications work best when started within 2 days of becoming sick.
- Some individuals may need to be treated in the hospital if:
 - They have other serious medical problems
 - Symptoms are severe
 - They are unable to eat or drink
 - They are older than 65 or a young child
 - Antibiotics are not helping

Home Treatment

- Drinking lots of fluids
- Getting lots of rest
- Avoiding cough medicines unless doctor recommended
- Controlling fever with medications
- Taking antibiotics, if prescribed

Warning Signs - Seek Medical Attention

Children

- 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 rash

Adults

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough



More information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Flu Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm;

Pneumonia: <https://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/index.html>

American Lung Association: <http://www.lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/pneumonia/symptoms-causes-and-risk.html>