

FactSheet

Protect Yourself and Others This Flu Season

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), approximately 5 to 20 percent of Americans will develop influenza (“the flu”) each year. Of those people, more than 30,000 will die and 200,000 will require hospitalization.

Flu season typically begins in October and often continues through May. In Southern Nevada, the number of cases generally peaks in February.

How can I protect myself from the flu?

A flu shot is the most effective way to prevent illness. It is best to get the vaccine in October or November; however, it can be given as late as December. It takes two weeks to develop antibodies that provide protection against influenza. Because the virus varies each year, it is necessary to get a flu shot annually. The Health District encourages most everyone over 6 months of age to get vaccinated.

Flu shots are especially recommended for those at high risk of flu-related complications:

- Children age 6 months to 5 years
- Household contacts and caregivers of infants younger than 6 months old
- Pregnant women
- People age 50 and over
- People with certain chronic medical conditions, as well as their household contacts and caregivers

People who cannot get a flu shot:

- Children younger than 6 months old

- People who had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past
- People with severe, life-threatening allergies to the vaccine or any of its ingredients. Note: there are certain flu shots that have different age indications. For example people younger than 65 years of age should not get the high-dose flu shot and people who are younger than 18 or older than 64 should not get the intradermal flu shot.

People who should talk to their doctor before getting the flu shot:

- People who have an allergy to eggs or other vaccine ingredients
- People who have ever had Guillain-Barré syndrome
- People who are feeling ill

How can I prevent spreading germs if I am sick?

Germs spread through coughing and sneezing or unclean hands cause the flu and other respiratory illnesses. These illnesses spread easily in crowded places, including hospitals and office workplaces.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze.
- Throw used tissues in a wastebasket with a plastic liner.
- Cough into the crook of your elbow if tissues are not available.

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- After coughing or sneezing, wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Try to distance yourself from other people by at least three feet before coughing or sneezing.
- Change linens frequently.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels or other personal items.
- Keep household surfaces clean.
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco.

What else can I do to stay healthy?

- Wash your hands frequently with warm, soapy water for at least 30 seconds (the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” or “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” twice).
- If soap and water are unavailable, use alcoholbased hand sanitizers.
- Keep your hands away from your nose, eyes and mouth. Viruses are most likely to enter your body through these areas.
- Stop smoking. It irritates the lining in your nose, sinuses and lungs, which may make you susceptible to complications of the flu.
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Keep stress levels low.
- Get plenty of rest.

Will antibiotics or vitamins prevent the flu?

Taking antibiotics will not treat or prevent viral infections such as the flu. If a bacterial infection such as an ear or sinus infection develops after the flu, antibiotics might be helpful.

Additionally, large doses of vitamin C, or other vitamins and minerals, will not prevent or treat the flu.

Do I need to see a doctor?

Most healthy people do not need to see a doctor for the flu. The illness usually goes away in about seven to 10 days. Although you may feel quite sick, home treatment is usually all that is needed.

You should see a doctor if:

- An infant under age 3 months has a fever of 100.4° F or higher.
- A child age 3 months to 3 years has a fever of 104° F or higher that does not come down after four to six hours of home treatment.
- A person age 4 or older has a fever of 104° F or higher that does not come down after two hours of home treatment.
- Your fever does not begin to go down after three to five days.
- You have a fever that goes away and then returns. (You could have a bacterial infection.)
- You or your child also has shortness of breath or other breathing problems.
- You or your child has a fever and a severe headache or stiff neck, or seems confused or hard to wake.
- A child who is ill and is not eating, taking fluids, or stops urinating, which can signify dehydration.



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