

Flu Self-Care Guide

Learn how to care for someone with the flu at home:

- Recognize flu signs and symptoms.
- Know when to call the doctor or seek emergency medical care.
- Check and treat fever.
- Stay hydrated.
- Limit the spread of flu.

While these actions are important during a typical flu season, they are even more important during a pandemic, when more people may become sick and hospitals, doctors, and other services that you depend on may not be available.

The more prepared you are, the better off you and your family will be.



For the complete version of this guide and other information about the flu, visit

www.health.ri.gov/flu

or call 401-222-5960 / RI Relay 711

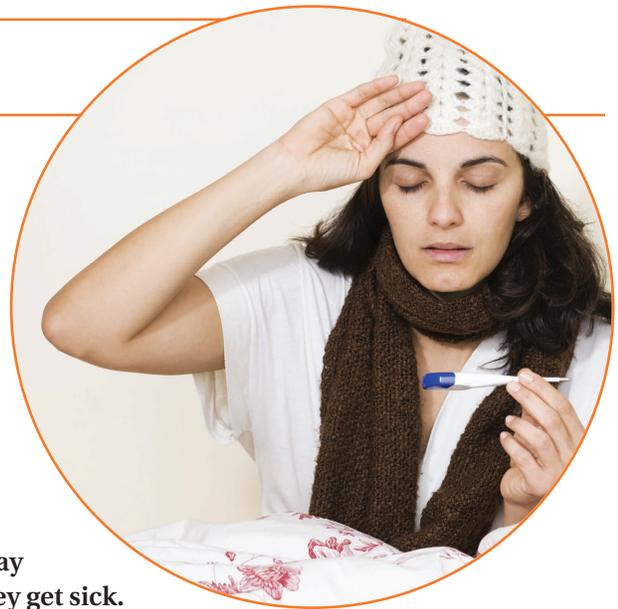


Recognize Flu Signs and Symptoms

It is important to know what symptoms to look for:

- Sudden fever higher than 100.4° F (38°C)
- Cough and/or sore throat
- Chills
- Muscle aches or pain
- Headache
- Feeling weak and very tired
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Signs of dehydration, such as decreased urine, dry mouth and eyes, or dizziness
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or abdominal pain (more common in children)

Please note: People with chronic illnesses or special healthcare needs may experience more severe flu symptoms and should call their doctors if they get sick.



Know When to Call the Doctor

It can be difficult to know when to call or visit the doctor. Most people who get the flu will have mild illness and will recover without needing medical care or antiviral drugs.

However, consider calling your doctor for advice if you get sick with flu-like symptoms and you have any questions or concerns about your illness, or if you are at high risk of flu-related complications.

High-risk groups include:

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- People who have medical conditions including:
 - » Asthma
 - » Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or cystic fibrosis)
 - » Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions (such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy)
 - » Heart disease
 - » Diabetes
 - » Blood, kidney, liver, or metabolic disorders
 - » Weakened immune systems due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, cancer, or those on chronic steroids)
 - » People younger than 19 years old who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy

Your doctor can advise you over the phone if you need to come in for an appointment or start taking antiviral drugs. Calling first may help you avoid an unnecessary visit, keep doctors' offices from becoming overwhelmed, and limit the spread of flu.

EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS

Sometimes, people with the flu get very sick and require emergency medical attention. Seek emergency care immediately if you have any of the following signs or symptoms:

Adults

- » Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- » Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- » Sudden dizziness
- » Confusion
- » Severe or persistent vomiting

Children

- » Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- » Bluish color on skin or around mouth and lips
- » Dehydration (no tears, dried lips and mouth, 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 a worse cough
- » Fever with a rash

Check and Treat Fever

Fever is the body's normal response to an infection and plays a role in fighting viruses by turning on the body's immune system. The body's normal temperature is 98.6°F (37°C). With a fever, the body's temperature is above 100.4°F (38°C). A fever typically lasts between 2 and 5 days with the flu.

You can take a person's temperature a variety of ways, depending on the person's age and preference. Always follow the instructions that came with the thermometer.

To bring the fever down:

- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Remove extra clothing and blankets. Young children should not wear "onesies".
- Give a sponge bath in warm (not cold) water.
- Give fever-reducing medicines (such as Tylenol® or Motrin®). Always read the labels carefully before giving any medicine. Never give aspirin to anyone younger than 19 years old due to the risk of Reye's Syndrome, which is a very serious illness of the liver and brain.

Stay Hydrated

Starting at the first sign of the flu, give a sick person plenty of liquids to drink, such as Gatorade®, Pedialyte®, or clear broth. Even things like JELL-O® and popsicles count as liquids. If the sick person is vomiting, allow his or her stomach to settle for one hour and then offer a small amount (such as one teaspoon) of clear liquid about every 10 minutes.

People who are sick may not feel like drinking, but it is important to keep giving them liquids to prevent dehydration. Dehydration happens when the body loses too much water (for example, through vomiting or sweating) and the water is not replaced quickly enough.

Please note: Avoid alcoholic and caffeinated drinks (such as coffee, some herbal teas, and sodas) because they can cause further dehydration. Avoid juices (such as pear juice and apple juice) because they can promote diarrhea.

SIGNS OF DEHYDRATION INCLUDE

- Little or no urine
- Dark color or concentrated urine
- Dry mouth with little amounts of saliva
- Dry eyes with little or no tear production
- Sunken eyes
- Weakness
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Doughy or loose skin
- Fainting

Limit the Spread of Flu



It is important to practice preventive measures all the time to limit the spread of flu.

- Wash your hands often.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue and throw away used tissues.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay home if you are sick until you have been fever-free (temperature less than 100.4°F or 38°C) for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines such as Tylenol®.

If someone in your home is sick, do the following additional things:

- Isolate him or her in a specific room, preferably with a door. Get fresh air into the room if possible.
- Limit other people's exposure to that person by picking one caregiver and discouraging visitors.
- Wear a surgical mask and gloves when caring for the sick person. The sick person may also wear a mask. Masks and gloves may be purchased at any retail pharmacy.
- Do not share personal items, such as toothbrushes and drinking glasses.
- Disinfect common area surfaces, such as doorknobs, light switches, and countertops.

Please note: A sick person with the flu is most contagious when he or she has a fever. Generally, people are much less likely to spread the flu after they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines.

Preparing Your Home

You may need to take care of your family at home when they get the flu. It is a good idea to get supplies in your home **BEFORE** someone becomes sick.

What to have on hand for flu care at home:

- Thermometer
- Drinks with electrolytes (such as Gatorade® or Pedialyte®)
- Extra supply of prescription medicines
- Pain and fever medicines for adults
- Cough medicines for adults
- Liquid cough, pain, and fever medicines for children (Look for the words “children’s,” “acetaminophen,” or “ibuprofen” on the labels of pain and fever medicines for children. Never give aspirin to children younger than 19 years old, and do not give cough or cold medicines to children younger than 4 years old.)
- Tissues
- Alcohol-based hand gel
- Eye dropper (for giving liquids to infants or small children)
- Surgical masks
- Cleaning supplies such as soap, laundry detergent, rubber gloves, antibacterial wipes, and paper towels
- Important phone numbers (such as local emergency numbers and phone numbers for your family doctor, family members and caregivers, and babysitters)

