

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
[www.astate.edu/college/conhp](http://www.astate.edu/college/conhp)



## Flu Awareness & Prevention

### Overview

The flu, influenza, and seasonal flu are all synonymous terms. The two main forms of the influenza virus are types A and B. They are highly contagious viral infections that affect the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). Unlike the common cold, flu symptoms are much worse, and this virus can cause severe and life threatening complications. An estimated 5%-20% of the population gets the flu virus each season. We are currently in "flu season", which begins in October and can last until May. According to the CDC, the flu most often peaks in February. However, this virus is constantly changing, making it unpredictable in severity, timing, and length of the season. There is one constant about this illness, and it is that the United States experiences seasonal flu epidemics each year. The

CDC says that this epidemic affects 300,000 to 600,000 people each year. These facts can be frightful and intimidating, but with the right awareness and prevention tactics, the flu can be avoided or lessened in severity.

### Causes

The influenza virus is spread through air droplets from infected persons who sneeze, cough, or talk. An uninfected person can get the virus from inhaling the droplets directly, or by touching an object that has been contaminated and then touching the eyes, nose, or mouth. Studies have shown that the virus can live on surfaces for 2-8 hours. Individuals with a compromised immune system such as older adults (65+), young children, pregnant women or persons with certain health conditions are at a higher risk for contracting the flu and experiencing serious symptoms. Healthy

adults who contract the flu are able to spread the virus a day before they begin showing symptoms, and up to seven days after becoming ill.

### Symptoms

The flu is different from a cold in that it comes on suddenly and is accompanied by some or all of the following symptoms:

- Fever over 100°F
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny/stuffy nose
- Muscle/body aches
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Vomiting/diarrhea (more common in children)

### Emergency Warning Signs

Most individuals who have the flu will recover in a few days or weeks, however some experience complications as

a result of the illness and need to seek medical attention.

- Warning signs for children
  - Bluish skin
  - Fast breathing
  - Trouble breathing
  - Dehydration
  - Fever with rash
  - Not waking or interacting
  - Not wanting to be held due to irritability
  - Flu-like symptoms that improve and then return with fever and a worsening cough
- Warning signs for infants (in addition to the above)
  - Unable to eat
  - No tears when crying
  - Significantly fewer wet diapers
- Warning signs for adults
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Pain/pressure in the chest or abdomen
  - Sudden dizziness
  - Confusion
  - Severe or persistent vomiting
  - Flu-like symptoms that improve and then return with fever and a worsening cough

### Treatment

Antiviral drugs are a treatment option for individuals who have the flu. There are prescription medications that can help lessen symptoms as well as shorten the duration of the sickness. These drugs may be prescribed depending on duration of the illness, severity, and medical history. The following are further

recommendations when ill with the flu.

- Get plenty of rest and fluids.
- CDC recommends staying home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone, except to get medical care if needed.
- Seek medical attention when needed (refer to above warning signs.)

### Prevention

The key to beating the flu is to prevent it all together. The following are tips and recommendations for prevention.

- Flu vaccination- CDC recommends that everyone over 6 months of age receives annual vaccinations, including pregnant women. The vaccine will protect against the influenza viruses that are predicted to be most common.
- Control the spread of infection.
  - Wash your hands with soap and water.
  - Carry alcohol based sanitizer for times when a sink is not available.
  - Contain coughs and sneezes (cover the mouth and nose with a tissue or inner elbow.)
  - Disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with the virus.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

- Exercise and eat a balanced diet.
- Get 7-9 hours of sleep each night.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.

### References

- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/flu/basics/causes/con-20035101>
- <http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/flu-guide/what-causes-flu-viruses>
- <https://www.concentra.com/patients/health-library/influenza/>
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### Other News:

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

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The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Jordan Hood, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.