



Five Tips for Getting through Flu Season

By Ralph Morris, MD, MPH

The 2016–2017 flu season is off to a slow start, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts an uptick in flu activity in the coming weeks and months. Here are some tips to help prepare and inform you as flu appears in your community:

1. *Get a Flu Shot:* CDC recommends a flu shot for everyone six months old and older. Flu vaccines protect against the three or four flu viruses most likely to spread in a given season. What segments of the population are most vulnerable to flu-related complications? The very young, people aged 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease are most at risk for complications.



To help avoid spreading the flu to those in their care, health care workers and people who care for vulnerable populations, including families of babies under the age of six months, should be sure to get their flu shot.

Maximum immune system protection against the flu takes about two weeks from the time of vaccination. CDC advises people to get their flu shots each year by the end of October. Some health departments are proclaiming: “Vaccine before Halloween!”¹ This year’s breaking news on flu is that the [nasal spray is not recommended by CDC](#) because [its effectiveness is in question](#).

2. *Wash Your Hands:* Washing your hands [frequently and thoroughly](#) is one of the most important ways to elude the flu. Flu virus particles are very good at hitching a ride from contaminated surfaces (door knobs and hand rails, for example)—where they gather like airline passengers at a departure gate—to your hands and then for the “flight” to your eyes, nose and mouth. Viruses can only spread by infecting new hosts, and they appreciate not being washed down the drain. Give them the slip with thorough hand washing (use alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are unavailable), and keep your hands away from your face.
3. *Disinfect Frequently Touched Surfaces:* Destroy flu virus particles where they lurk to lower your odds of picking them up and becoming infected. Clean surfaces first with detergent and water and then sanitize using two teaspoons of high strength household

¹ See, for example, this [WJHG.com video](#).

bleach (8.25%) per gallon of water. Alternatively, wipe down surfaces with disposable pre-moistened wipes containing chlorine bleach.

4. *Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle:* Get adequate sleep, maintain a healthy diet, stay hydrated and exercise regularly to keep your immune system on alert against flu and other infections.
5. *Be Kind to Others:* If you do get the flu, stay home and limit your contact with others. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a disposable tissue and wash your hands after using tissues. Tissues not available? Cough or sneeze into your elbow to help prevent projecting thousands of infected mucous droplets into the air that others breathe! Finally, keep your distance from those who appear to have flu symptoms but have opted to be out and about anyway.

Not sure if you have the flu or a cold? Use this [chart](#) to help you decide. For more information on the seasonal flu, please see this [CDC website](#).

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