

Ten Nice To Know Facts About The Flu

1. **SOBERING STATISTICS.** Between 5% and 20% of Americans (of all ages) will get the flu during a particular year. Of those individuals, approximately 200,000 on average, will be hospitalized. As such, up to 49,000 people will die each year due to flu-related causes, which makes influenza (along with pneumonia) the eighth leading cause of death in American men.
2. **NOT THE SAME.** A cold and the flu, while having a few similar symptoms, are quite different conditions. Know these differences can lead to more appropriate, as well as more effective, treatment. The main characteristic they share is the fact that they're both respiratory illnesses. Unlike the common cold (which is called "common" for a reason), the flu can develop example). Mother key difference is the fact that the flu generally is seasonal (*i.e.*, transpiring from the fall to the spring, peaking during the winter months). In contrast, a cold can occur at any time.
3. **CAUSE AND EFFECT.** Seasonal flu is caused by the active strains of a variety of flu viruses. Although most health care experts believe that at least three different flu viruses currently exist in America, all types of flu tend to have similar symptoms, including a fever, a dry hacking cough, a sore throat, aching muscles, a running or stuffy nose, chills, fatigue, and so on. As a rule, most typical cases of the flu run their course in a week or less.
4. **A RISKY SITUATION.** The flu is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract that affects individuals of all ages, some more than others. Among the groups that are more likely to experience complications from the seasonal flu are children, pregnant women, older adults, and people who are suffering from one or more chronic health conditions.
5. **SENSIBLE SAFEGUARDS.** The flu is spread by virus-infected droplets that are coughed or sneezed into the air. Individuals get the flu by either having these germs land in their mouth or nose or by touching a surface or object on which these droplets have landed and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. As such, people can take certain steps to help protect themselves, including washing their hands frequently with soap and water; avoiding touching their eyes, nose, and mouth; and practicing sound health habits.
6. **IMPROVING THE ODDS.** Overwhelmingly, most experts believe that the best way for individuals to protect themselves from the flu is to be vaccinated. In that regard, the common recommendation is that everyone who is 6 months or older should get vaccinated annually (preferably in September) against the flu.
7. **MIMICKING THE REAL THING.** Vaccines help individuals develop immunity to the flu by imitating a particular infection in their body. This infection causes the person's immune system to produce "memory" antibodies. In turn, this supply of antibodies, which typically is produced within a few weeks after the individual is vaccinated, remembers how to fight the flu in the future.

8. **THE BEST MEDICINE.** As a rule, fluids and rest are the most effective means for treating the flu. Individuals also can take certain over-the-counter medicines to help provide relatively immediate relief for their symptoms. For example, a decongestant can be helpful in controlling nasal or sinus congestion. In rum, an antihistamine can help relieve such symptoms as sneezing, nasal discharge, watery eyes, and itching.
9. **MYTHS AND MADNESS.** Like many subjects, considerable misinformation exists concerning the flu. One of the biggest whoppers involving the flu is the claim that "the flu vaccine can give a person the flu." In fact, it is an impossibility, given the fact that injected flu vaccines only contain dead viruses, which are incapable of infecting anyone. Mother folk tale involving the flu is that "the flu is annoying, but harmless." The underlying falsehood of this particular myth is illustrated by the fact that the flu kills more than twice the number of Americans who die annually from AIDS.
10. **NOTHING WORTHWHILE IS EVER EASY.** Developing flu vaccines can be challenging for several reasons. First and foremost, flu viruses are constantly changing and mutating — sometimes suddenly and in other instances across time. Because these changes occur frequently enough, an individual's immune system often cannot recognize a particular flu virus from year to year. Accordingly, a new flu vaccine must be developed every year.

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