

How to Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones Against the Flu, Avian Flu (Bird Flu) and other Colds and Cough Illnesses

The following tips can help protect you and your loved ones during the regular flu season, as well as from the threat of bird flu and other colds and cough illnesses.

◇ **Wash your hands.**

Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.

◇ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.**

This decreases the chance that you will introduce influenza virus and other infectious agents into parts of your body where infection can begin. It also decreases your potential infectiousness to others.

◇ **Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.**

Never cough in the direction of someone else. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the inside of your elbow.

◇ **Clean things that are touched often.**

Clean things that are touched often at home, work or school like door or refrigerator handles, computer key boards / mouse, phone and water faucets.

◇ **Avoid close contact with others who are ill.**

Avoid holding, hugging or kissing anyone who has a cold or the flu.

◇ **Those with young children, immune system problems and the chronically ill should avoid large crowds, unless necessary.**

◇ **Avoid bird markets and farms, or direct contact with birds when visiting countries that have bird flu.**

For additional information about travel to countries that have bird flu (H5N1), visit the CDC traveler's website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>.

◇ **Stay home when you are ill.**

If you have flu symptoms, stay home from work or school **and avoid public activities for at least 5 days (7 days for children).**

◇ **Get a flu shot annually.**

The current flu vaccine does not provide protection against bird flu. But, getting a flu shot every year is an important way to stay healthy.

◇ **Ask your health care provider if you should get a pneumococcal shot.**

You may need it if you are at high risk.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health does **not** recommend you keep supplies of antiviral medications, such as Tamiflu[®] at home.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE FLU AND WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

What is the flu?

The flu is a very contagious disease of the respiratory (breathing) system. The flu is easily passed from one person to another by coughing and sneezing. It is usually very unpleasant, but for most people symptoms generally get better after 7–10 days.

The flu usually starts very suddenly with:

- fever (from 102° – 104°) lasting 3 – 4 days
- headache
- severe muscle aches
- general weakness/extreme fatigue

These symptoms are accompanied by:

- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose

What to do if you have the flu:

- Rest in bed
- Drink lots of fluids
- Take non-aspirin pain relievers such as acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®, Motrin®, etc.). Never give aspirin to children or teens with flu symptoms as they can develop a serious disease called Reye syndrome
- Stay home and avoid public activities until your symptoms are resolved (usually 5-7 days)
- Talk with your health care provider if you are considering prescription drugs as they can have serious side effects in some people
- For extreme cases, visit your health care provider or the emergency department as soon as possible

Note: If you are at high risk for complications from the flu you should

consult your health care provider when your flu symptoms begin. Your doctor may recommend certain antiviral drugs to treat the flu.

When should you see a health care provider?

You should see a health care provider or go to an emergency room immediately if you have any of the symptoms below:

- Flu symptoms that are strong or that do not go away after 7-10 days
- Breathing that is fast, difficult or painful
- Bluish skin
- Cough with yellow mucous
- Getting sick again with fever and/or a worse cough after getting better.
- Not drinking enough fluids

Parents should seek medical attention for infants and children that are:

- Not waking up; not interacting with others
- So irritable they do not want to be held

What to do if you become ill after traveling to an area affected by avian flu (H5N1)?

If you have traveled to an area affected by avian flu and become ill within 10 days of your return with a fever and cough or difficulty breathing, call your health care provider right away. Tell them the following: 1) your symptoms; 2) where you traveled; and 3) if you have had direct contact with poultry. (If you develop these problems after being in contact with an ill individual who has recently traveled to the affected areas, you should also contact your healthcare provider right away.)