

Simple Ways to Lower Your Flu Risk

Flu season is quickly approaching, and although there is no way to guarantee your safety, there are strategies to help prevent and appease the virus. Getting a flu shot is simple and effective, and can be easily scheduled at several public centers around your city. Scheduling a vaccination, along with following these guidelines, may be just what it takes to make it through this year healthy and happy.

The most effective way to avoid getting the flu is, of course, the flu shot. But there are other steps you can take to help protect yourself from acquiring the virus.

Your primary defense against the flu and any other contagious disease is good hygiene. Practiced alone, these tips may not be entirely effective in helping to elude influenza, but performed in conjunction with a flu vaccine, they are the best way to beat the virus:

- **Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.** - Not only are your hands the part of your body that come into contact with the environment, your surroundings, and germs more than any other, but they also interact with the delicate passageways into your body: your eyes, nose, mouth, and ears. Touching surfaces—in your own home, office, on a bus, or at a park—puts you at risk for picking up the germs that are present all around us. To help reduce your risk of influenza or any other contagious infection, it is vital that you wash your hands thoroughly several times a day, especially after coming in contact with questionable surfaces, after using the restroom, or before touching your mouth or face.
- **Use an alcohol-based sanitizer.** – This is a wise way to kill germs and protect against disease.

- **Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose.** - Washing your hands is an important precaution to take to avoid exposing yourself to infection, but our hands can't be clean every minute of the day. Because our bodies most easily absorb germs through the liquids in our eyes, mouth, and nose, it is important to avoid touching these areas. Nail biters risk ingesting germs more than most, so they should be especially aware not to bite their nails while in public places. Covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze and washing your hands immediately afterward is also an important way to avoid unnecessarily spreading germs.
- **Avoid crowds during flu season.** - Although it is impossible to quarantine yourself entirely during the lengthy flu season, it is wise to avoid unnecessary crowds and excessive travel which confines you in close, unventilated areas with many other people. Places that present the highest risk are those with higher numbers of children or the elderly, since they are more likely to have influenza.

If you find that you simply must go to the movie theater during peak flu season, make sure to practice good hygiene more diligently:

- Carry hand sanitizer
 - Distance yourself from your sneezing neighbor.
 - Avoid excessive contact with your mouth.
- **Disinfect contaminated surfaces.** - You may think you're free from the dangers of influenza exposure in the safety of your own home, but, unlike other visitors, germs don't knock on your front door.

Countertops, especially those in the kitchen and bathroom, are teeming with germs. These are also settings where we are most in contact with our mouths, noses, and genitalia.

If you prepare a snack on a contaminated surface, chances are, you will be ingesting those germs along with your turkey sandwich. Any object that children touch should be sanitized as well, including toys, faucets, and floors.

What To Do If You Become Sick

If you do become exposed to influenza, it will usually last about 7 to 10 days, and may be marked by coughing, sneezing, headache, fever, chills, and fatigue.

Although there is no way to rid your body of the infection, you can take steps to reduce discomfort and feel better.

- **Get extra rest.** - Rest is important when combating any illness. Not only does it keep you indoors, preventing you from spreading the disease to others, it can also help your body recover quicker and feel better. Being sick is physically and emotionally exhausting, so sleeping and lying down are necessary steps for recovery. You may find that your body is tired and achy, so listen to it and stay in bed.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** - Being sick is dehydrating, and your body loses fluids from fever. Drinking fluid not only replaces lost fluids, but it also eases an irritated throat and helps flush out mucous and toxins.

Hot tea with lemon and honey will sooth a scratchy throat. Other good options are water, fruit juice, and soup.

Often, the flu reduces appetite and makes it hard to consume food, which gives our bodies energy to recover. Drinking enriched juices and soups is an easy to digest way to get calories into the body.

- **Take Painkillers.** - To help relieve body aches and headaches, take acetaminophen or ibuprofen as directed. Be careful administering drugs to babies, and talk with your doctor if you find you need to continue medication for longer than a week. Cough drops and cough medicine can also be taken to ease a sore throat and calm coughing.

- **Take a warm bath.** - If fever is high and uncomfortable, you can sponge or immerse your body with lukewarm water to help reduce fever. Ice or cold water should be avoided, as it will aggravate the fever, but lukewarm water may help alleviate discomfort. Breathing moist air from a hot shower, sink, or vaporizer may also help to clear a stuffy nose.