

Why the Flu is being called A Silent Killer

The flu has been looked at as something that is just a part of life. But this year, we all may need to realize the seriousness of the flu.

There are times of the year when there is heightened awareness around the flu and how deadly it can be if we do not take specific precautions. But, we may not realize the seriousness of the flu beyond “flu season.”

It's never too late to become educated about what you can do to be preventative so that you can lessen your risk of getting the flu.

Here are some quick facts about the flu:

- Flu cases typically start in the fall/winter, peak in February, but can also be prevalent until May.
- Flu symptoms are associated with a sore throat, a high fever, muscle aches, a cough and malaise.
- It is generally transmitted via airborne droplets and the flu is so infectious that it can sit on a surface for hours. In one case, on an airplane, where there was no air circulation, when a plane sat for 3 hours, within 3 days 39 of 54 people got the flu virus which came from one single passenger. This is evidence that the flu can be contracted and spread easily.

The History of the Flu

Historically, the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918-1919 caused over 500,000 deaths. And while we have more preventative vaccinations or measures in place to counteract the flu virus, it still kills thousands each year in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, worldwide, the flu kills about 250,000 to 500,000 people annually. And 12,000 to 70,000 per year in the United States.

Now that I have your attention about the seriousness of the flu, you may be wondering who's at the highest risk for getting the flu and what are the best ways you can protect yourself?

Higher Risk Patients

There are several individuals who fall into the category of being a higher risk for having more complications if they contract the flu virus. They include the following:

- **Those on statins who are over 65.** Statin drugs tend to blunt the immune response to flu vaccination. If you decide to get a flu vaccine, make sure you get a high-dose version of the vaccine or a vaccine that contains an adjuvant or booster, both of which stimulate an effective immune response.
- **Patients in long-term skilled facilities are also at risk.** Often influenza can come via newly admitted residents, the health care workers who work with the patients at the facility, or visitors who may come to the facility.
- **Children under 5 years of age.** Influenza or the flu are common in children younger than 2 years old and they usually have severe complications. An average of 20,000 children under the age 5 are hospitalized due to having flu complications, some resulting in death.
- **Children who have asthma, diabetes, and disorders of the brain and nervous system** are also more likely to develop flu complications.
- **Pregnant women and those women up to two weeks postpartum** are also at risk for contracting the flu. This is likely due to the changes in the immune system as well as the major organs including the heart and lungs. The flu can further complicate a pregnant woman's unborn child leading to labor and delivery occurring prematurely.

Best Ways to Protect Yourself

Here are ways you can protect yourself from the flu virus:

If you have the flu or flu-like symptoms. They are highly contagious. If you have to be a caretaker to someone who has the flu, wear a face mask or respirator.

- Make sure you wash your hands frequently and thoroughly.** Pay close attention to 'common surfaces' that others may touch and/or handled.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.** These are the entryways for viruses to enter into your body.
- Also, it should be noted that getting the **flu shot** provides the best protection against the flu and can be taken even if you are pregnant.
- If you feel you have flu-like symptoms, make sure you make an appointment to see your physician immediately.** They can provide you with an antiviral drug that will provide treatment for the flu.

Be proactive in protecting yourself from the influenza virus. By taking the right precautions for you and your family, and receiving the necessary medical care if you do experience flu-like symptoms, you will help reduce your risk of the flu or complications from it.

Getting the Flu & COVID at the Same Time: How Can You Tell?

As if being in the coronavirus pandemic was enough, we are coming out of the allergy season, and into flu season. All of which have some of the same symptoms.

While it was initially thought that getting the flu and contracting the coronavirus COVID-19 were separate, now it appears you can get both infections at once.

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Having this double whammy might wreak havoc on your immune system and increase the risk of more serious illnesses.

In addition to your personal health, medical facilities may get overwhelmed by people with both illnesses, potentially wreaking havoc on hospital capacity.

“Once you get infected with the flu and some other respiratory viruses, it weakens your body,” said Yasmin, director of the Stanford Health Communication Initiative.

“Your defenses go down, and it makes you vulnerable to getting a second infection on top of that.”

On their own, both Covid-19 and the flu can attack the lungs, potentially causing pneumonia, fluid in the lungs or respiratory failure, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

Each illness can also cause sepsis, cardiac injury and inflammation of the heart, brain or muscle tissues.

Because Covid-19 didn't spread across the US until near the end of the last flu season, it's too early to know exactly how much worse this “twin-demic” as some call it, could be, compared to having each virus on its own.

While getting the flu shot, may or may not prevent you from getting the flu, “the flu shot cannot defend you against coronavirus,” says Dr. Sanjay Gupta of [CNN](#).

Just 45 percent of adults in the United States got the flu shot last year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, even though the seasonal version of the disease is deadly, **killing an average of 37,000 people every year over the past decade.**

How Can You Tell the Difference between the Flu and Coronavirus?

Both the flu and Covid-19 can give you a

fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, sore throat, body aches and a runny or stuffy nose, the CDC said.

Lisa Maragakis, senior director of infection prevention at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland says, that “the symptoms for flu and COVID-19 are so similar that one of the challenges we're dealing with this year is diagnosing people correctly and quickly.

Even if you have mild symptoms, don't attempt to ride out a virus on your own, and don't assume that coughing is the only clue you've got COVID-19.

You should contact your doctor if you have body aches, fever, a sore throat, or respiratory symptoms so you can be tested for COVID-19.

The list of warning signs for the coronavirus is continually expanding and now includes loss of taste or smell, nausea, diarrhea, or even swollen red toes.”

It’s important to know which infection you have. With the flu, your doctor can prescribe an antiviral medication.

But if you have COVID-19, your doctor will help you decide if you need to go to the hospital for severe symptoms where you might be prescribed steroids or other experimental medications.

Plus, you’ll have to be quarantined to avoid transmitting it to others.