

# INFLUENZA & FLU VACCINE

Did you know that communities, as well as individuals get “the flu?” Your own flu prevention strategies will not only serve you, but also help limit the spread of influenza viruses to others.



## What is the flu?

Flu is a contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract (nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs). It usually comes on fast and can cause a wide range of symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also experience diarrhea and vomiting. A case of the flu can vary in severity from mild to severe. If you have a chronic health condition or are pregnant, you may be at higher risk for serious flu-related complications.

## What isn't the flu?

It's easy to confuse a common cold with flu. In general, colds are milder and don't last as long as flu symptoms. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose without a fever.

## Flu vaccine

WHY? Public health officials and primary care providers agree: the most important thing you can do to avoid getting the flu this season (and missing out on a week of whatever you had planned) is to get a flu vaccine. The CDC recommends that everyone (over 6 months) get vaccinated every year to protect against the flu. The vaccine is updated annually to protect against the types and strains of viruses most likely to be in circulation.

WHERE? Every fall semester Villanova sponsors a flu clinic for students, faculty and staff. Outside of the flu clinic, students should get the flu shot when home on a break.

HOW MUCH? Insurance is accepted at the flu clinic, so all costs associated with the flu shot can be reimbursed.

SIDE EFFECTS? In spite of rumors to the contrary, getting a flu vaccine does not give you the flu, and the risk of having a severe reaction to the shot is less than 1 in 4 million. Your arm and/or body may ache for a day or two, but it shouldn't set you back on your study, work, or fun.

## Other key prevention strategies

The flu is highly contagious and spreads by contact with the oral and nasal secretions of others who have been infected.

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water (use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you don't have access to a sink).
- Don't share eating and drinking utensils, lip balms, smoking paraphernalia, etc.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs are spread when a person touches something that is contaminated and then touches her or his eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Take care of your immune system by eating well, getting plenty of sleep, engaging in physical activity, and managing stress.

## What to do if you get the flu

- Rest up. Sleep is the best thing you can do to heal and recover. Although it may be difficult to arrange in your hectic life, your body needs bed rest for several days to fight off the infection and avoid further

complications. If you don't rest when you're sick with the flu, it will take longer to recover fully.

- Treat symptoms. You may recover more comfortably by taking non-prescription medications to treat symptoms, including ibuprofen or acetaminophen for aches and pains; lozenges for a sore throat; decongestants for a runny nose. Do NOT take aspirin or aspirin containing medicines due to the risk of Reye's Syndrome in young people. Note: antibiotic treatment is not effective for flu, as flu is caused by a virus, not bacteria.
- Drink lots of clear liquids. The fever that often accompanies the flu causes your body to use more fluid than usual. As a result, you can become dehydrated, which will increase fever. To avoid dehydration, drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water, broth, herbal tea, Gatorade, or another non-caffeinated carbonated beverage daily while you're sick with the flu.
- Take in adequate nutrition. Your immune system needs the support of adequate nutrition to recover well (soups, juices, applesauce, and other bland foods may be most comfortable).
- Monitor your temperature. You are most contagious when you have a fever. Wait to be fever-free for at least 24 hours (without medicine) before resuming class and activities.

### **Protect others when ill**

- Keep a distance (6 feet) from others.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to keep those around you from getting your germs.
- Stay home from class, and away from work, social gatherings, errands, and non-essential activity until you are fever-free.

## **When to get medical assistance**

Visit the Student Health Center if your symptoms worsen or complications develop, including:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach
- Dizziness
- Confusion or change in level of consciousness
- Persistent vomiting
- Difficulty swallowing
- Rash
- Symptoms improve but then return or worsen
- Fever of over 100°F lasting for more than three days, or a fever above 103°F

## **Antiviral therapy**

Antiviral drugs are ordered by prescription only and should be used early to treat flu in people who are very sick and those who have a greater chance of getting serious flu complications. Most healthy people with flu do not need antiviral therapy to recover. If you think you might benefit from antiviral therapy, visit the Student Health Center to discuss your options. Antiviral medications are most effective when taken in the first 24 to 48 hours of illness.

### **People at Greater Risk of Developing Flu-Related Complications:**

- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions, including (but not limited to):
  - asthma
  - diabetes
  - immune suppression
  - heart, lung, kidney, or liver disease
- Children under 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women