

Tips to avoid getting and transmitting the flu from Washoe County District Health Department

Getting vaccinated provides best protection

Flu vaccination is especially recommended for:

- Those age 50 and older
- Those with on-going, underlying health problems such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease, as these people are at high risk for developing serious complications if they get the flu
- Pregnant women
- Those who are key transmitters of seasonal influenza, especially children ages five through 17 and healthcare workers
- Anyone who wishes to avoid getting the flu.

What's new this year

For the first time this year, the CDC recommends that all children age six months and older get vaccinated against the flu. Children under nine years of age who received their first flu shot this season get a second vaccination to increase their protection.

There is plenty of vaccine available locally and it seems to be a good match for the strains that are circulating. Information about local flu vaccination clinic locations, times and costs can be found at www.immunizenevada.org or by calling 775.328.3724.

Three of the four anti-viral medications that have been developed to lessen the severity of flu symptoms once they begin have been found to be not as effective as initially hoped. Therefore, it is even more important to get vaccinated to decrease chances of getting the flu altogether.

Other key preventive measures

Additional key preventive measures for avoiding getting and transmitting the flu include:

- **Washing your hands often** with soap and water for at least 30 seconds to eliminate germs you may have picked up from touching things contaminated with the flu virus. Carry waterless hand sanitizer for use when soap and water are not available.
- **Covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze** to narrow the distance the droplets travel. While coughing/sneezing into your elbow or sleeve eliminates the need for using tissue and washing your hands afterwards, it's still important to wash your hands often as described above for the stated reason.
- **Avoiding touching your mouth and nose.** Many germs, including influenza, enter the body through these openings.
- **Staying away from crowds.** Influenza is transmitted via droplets, which enter the air from a cough or sneeze and can remain airborne for three to six feet. The closer you are to others, the greater your chance of coming into contact with infected airborne particles.
- **Staying home from work, school and social gatherings if you are not feeling well to avoid the spread of disease to others,** especially those at high risk for developing complications from the flu.

Cold vs. the flu

Influenza, also known as the "flu" is a contagious illness that affects the respiratory (breathing) system. If you do become ill, the type and severity of your symptoms can help you better manage your care. Key distinctions adapted from www.cdc.gov and www.tamiflu.com can include:

Symptom	Cold	Flu
Body/muscle aches	Slight body/muscle aches and pains can be part of a cold.	Severe body/muscle aches and pains are common with the flu.
Chest discomfort	Chest discomfort is mild to moderate with a cold.	Chest discomfort often is severe with the flu.
Chills	Chills are uncommon with a cold.	60% of people who have the flu experience

		chills.
Coughing	A hacking, productive (mucus-producing) cough often is present with a cold.	A dry (non-mucus-producing) cough usually is present with the flu.
Diarrhea	Diarrhea usually is not present with a cold.	Because the flu affects the breathing rather than the digestive system, diarrhea usually is not present with the flu. If it does occur with the flu, it usually is more common among children than adults.
Fever	Fever is rare with a cold.	Fever usually is present with the flu in up to 80% of all flu cases. A temperature of 100° or higher for 3 to 4 days is associated with the flu.
Headache	A headache is fairly common with a cold.	A headache is very common with the flu, present in 80% of flu cases.
Sneezing	Sneezing usually is present with a cold.	Sneezing is not common with the flu.
Sore throat	A sore throat often is present with a cold.	A sore throat may be present with the flu.
Stuffy or runny nose	A stuffy or runny nose commonly is present with a cold and typically resolves spontaneously within a week.	A stuffy or runny nose may be present with the flu.
Suddenness of symptoms	Cold symptoms tend to develop over a few days.	The flu comes on rapidly, often within 3 to 6 hours.
Tiredness	Tiredness is fairly mild with a cold.	Tiredness is moderate to severe with the flu.
Vomiting	Vomiting usually is not present with a cold.	Because the flu affects the breathing rather than the digestive system, vomiting usually is not present with the flu. If it does occur with the flu, it usually is more common among children than adults.

Know when to seek medical care

Many cases of the flu can be managed at home using over-the-counter medications, although aspirin should never be given to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, especially fever. Additionally, the Health Hotline, a free service offered by Renown Health, is staffed by registered nurses 24 hours a day seven days a week who can assist with questions about flu symptoms and suggest appropriate action to take. The number to call is 775.982.5757.

If over-the-counter medications don't seem to be working for symptom relief, a call to your doctor or visit to an urgent care center often can provide the appropriate level of care. When you arrive, tell the reception staff that you think you have the flu. You may be asked to wear a mask and/or sit in a separate area to protect others from getting sick.

Call 911 immediately if any of the following symptoms are present. They could indicate severe flu or other serious medical problem (e.g., heart problem, allergic reaction, etc.).

In children, emergency warning signs that need immediate medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need immediate medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting.