

FLU SEASON FIELD GUIDE

The Field Guide to Flu Season (Amidst COVID-19)

Follow these daily tips to avoid the worst of the flu.

The annual flu season will be upon us soon, which means it's time to review what we know to avoid this potentially deadly virus. And with the likelihood that COVID-19 will continue to be a threat during the fall and winter months, it will be even more important than normal to prepare for this year's influenza virus.

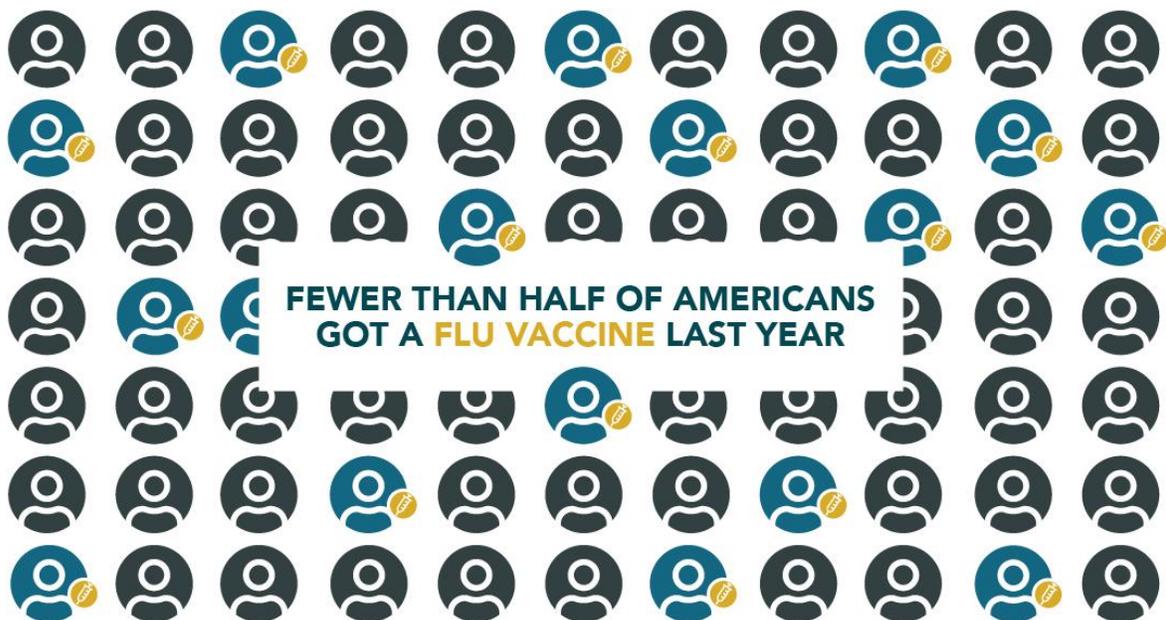
Follow these helpful tips below—and share them with friends—to stay as safe as possible this flu season. And remember, keeping yourself safe from the flu is also keeping your friends and loved ones safe, as well.

But First: COVID-19 AND the Flu?

While it's not possible to say with certainty what COVID-19 will look like during flu season (typically October through March), CDC experts believe it is likely that both viruses will be active at the same time. It is possible to have the flu and the COVID-19 virus at the same time, as well as other respiratory illnesses. Therefore, it's more important this year than ever to follow these flu tips to keep you and your loved ones safe.

Step 1: Get Your Flu Shot

The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get the annual flu vaccine. It remains the first and the most important step in preventing the flu. It's estimated that fewer than half of Americans got a flu vaccine last year,



which resulted in 410,000 hospitalizations related to the flu. And with the reduced capacity that many hospitals are currently experiencing due to COVID-19, it's vital to reduce as many flu-related hospitalizations as possible this year.

Getting the flu shot not only protects yourself from the flu, it protects those closest to you, like your friends and loved ones. Young children, pregnant women, people with chronic conditions and the elderly are at high risk of flu complications. When you get the flu vaccine, it can prevent you from unknowingly transmitting the disease to others.

Step 2: Avoid Close Contact with the Sick

If someone close to you has the flu, or is merely feeling unwell, do what you can to minimize contact with them until their symptoms resolve. And the same goes if you're feeling unwell: stay home and limit your contact with other people whenever possible.

It's better to play it safe and assume that you might have the flu—even if it is a mild case—than to interact with others and unknowingly infect them with the flu. What might have been a mild case of the flu for you could mean a flu-related hospitalization for someone else.

Step 3: Cover Your Coughs and Sneezes

Whether you have the flu or not, it is always a good idea to cover your coughs and sneezes. Many viral illnesses are spread through air droplets that come from your nose and mouth that land on others.

But **don't** cough or sneeze into your hands. You touch a variety of objects throughout the day with your hands, like your phone, doorknobs, keyboards, and other high-contact areas that others will touch later.

Cough or sneeze into a tissue if one is available, or the crook of your elbow. The inside of your elbow is much less likely to infect the surfaces around you than your hands. This latter method is sometimes called the "vampire sneeze," because it looks like you're holding Dracula's cape up to your mouth!

Step 4: Wash Your Hands—Often

One of the most common causes of getting sick is when you touch a high-contact surface (like a doorknob, mouse and keyboard, a friend's phone, or when shaking someone's hand) and then later touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. This transmits whatever virus you picked up with your hand into your body.

Fortunately, washing your hands with soap and warm water is an easy and practical way of keeping those hands clean! Soap, when mixed with water and vigorously rubbed in and around the hands, breaks down many common viruses like the flu and washes them away when rinsing your hands. So, make it a habit to wash your hands with soap and warm

water for at least 20 seconds throughout the day. If you don't have access to soap and running water, use an alcohol-based hand rub that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Step 5: Avoid Touching Your Face

Like the previous step mentioned, one of the most common ways we make ourselves sick is by touching our eyes, nose, or mouth with a hand that is carrying a virus or bacteria. So, do your best to avoid unnecessarily touching your face. If you really need to touch your face, wash your hands thoroughly or use a 60% alcohol-based hand rub beforehand.

DO'S



DON'TS



Step 6: Know the Symptoms of Flu

The most common flu symptoms include:

- fever*
- feeling feverish or chills
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headache
- fatigue
- vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults)

*However, it's important to note that not everyone with the flu will have a fever. Some people may exhibit all these symptoms, while others may exhibit only one or two. The flu can cause anywhere from mild to severe illness. Keep in mind that someone who is feeling terrible and remaining in bed may have the same flu virus as someone who is still up and walking with only a few of the symptoms above.

Either way, it's a good idea to contact your health care provider or onsite health center with your symptoms. They'll let you know what steps to take next.

Step 7: Take Your Doctor-Prescribed Medications

If you have the flu, or your healthcare provider suspects you have the flu, you'll most likely be prescribed an antiviral drug that is used to treat the virus. These antiviral drugs work best when they are started within two days of getting sick but taking them later can still be beneficial.

Antiviral drugs are different from **antibiotics**; antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections and do not help to treat the flu. You can only get antiviral drugs if you have a prescription from a healthcare provider, so it's important to meet with your provider if you suspect you have the flu.

And know that antiviral drugs do not replace getting the flu vaccine. Antiviral drugs are used to **treat** the flu, while a flu vaccine can help **prevent** getting the virus in the first place.

Step 8: Share This Guide with Friends

The more people who choose to get a flu shot this year—and who exercise these steps above—the safer your entire community will be. This is due to a principle called “herd immunity.” It means that a community is better protected from a virus or pathogen when most of that community is vaccinated from it. This means that those in the community who *are* more susceptible to the virus (due to age or health) or who cannot receive the flu vaccine remain safe.

By staying safe, healthy, and vaccinated, we can limit the number of flu-related hospitalizations and deaths. And this year, it's even more important due to the prevalence of COVID-19 and its likelihood to remain active during flu season. Remember: you're getting the flu vaccine for yourself *and* for your community!