

# Influenza (the flu)

## —What can I do?

October 2009

English Express special issue

### What is influenza (the flu)?

Many people get sick with the flu every year. In Canada, people usually get the flu between November and April. This flu is called “seasonal flu.”



✓ A virus causes the flu. The virus passes easily from person to person.

✓ There are many types of flu viruses. They can change from year to year.

#### What is H1N1?

There is a new type of flu virus. It is called H1N1. (say: H-one-N-one)

✓ H1N1 virus causes H1N1 flu. At first, many people called this flu “swine flu.”

✓ H1N1 virus is new. That means many people may get sick with H1N1 flu.

✓ Most people don’t get very sick when they get H1N1 flu. But some people can get very sick.

**Note:** In this issue, we use the word **flu** instead of **influenza**.

### How do I get the flu?

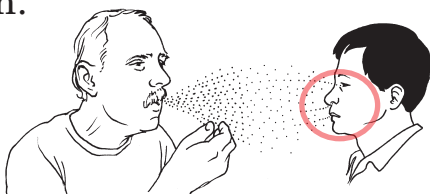
The flu virus passes easily from person to person.

For example:

☞ George has the flu. The flu virus goes into the air when he coughs, sneezes or talks.



☞ If people are nearby, the virus can enter their eyes, nose and mouth.

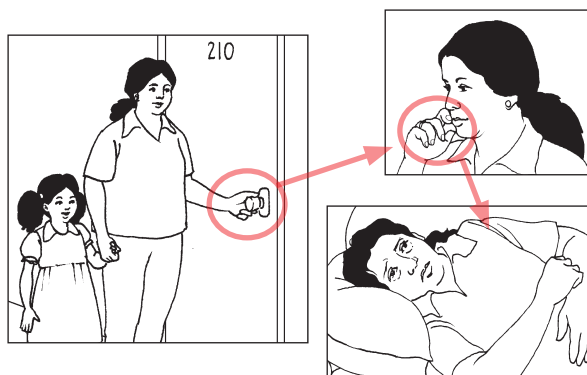


☞ George coughs into his hand. Then he touches a doorknob. Now the virus is on the doorknob.



☞ Later, Geetha touches the doorknob. The virus gets on her hand.

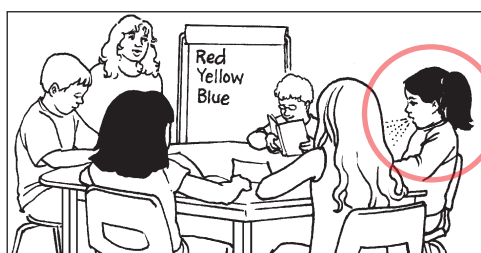
☞ The virus gets into her body when she touches her nose. A few days later, Geetha gets sick with the flu.



☞ Geetha passes the virus to her daughter Sneha. Soon Sneha gets the flu.



☞ Sneha can pass the virus to her classmates if she goes to school with the flu.

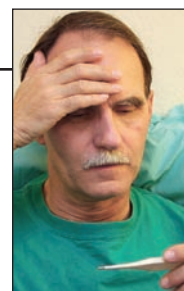


### How will I feel?

People often have these symptoms when they have the flu.

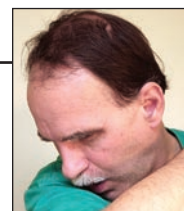
#### a fever

The fever is often 38°C (100.4°F) or higher. It starts suddenly.



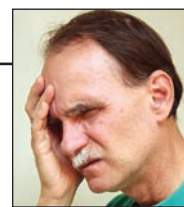
#### a dry cough

The cough can last for a few weeks.



#### an aching body

People have headaches.



People have pains in their legs and lower back.



#### very weak, tired

People feel too weak to do anything.



They don’t want to get out of bed.

### Other symptoms

Some people have other symptoms too.

For example:

■ the chills (You feel cold.)



■ a sore throat



■ a runny nose



■ no appetite (You don’t feel like eating.)



■ vomiting (throwing up)



■ nausea (You feel like you will vomit.)



■ diarrhea



**Note:** A baby may cry more than usual.

# How can I protect myself and others from the flu?

## 1 Get flu shots every year

A flu shot helps protect people from the flu.



### Two different flu shots

There are 2 different flu shots for the 2009 flu season.

- ✓ One shot is for “seasonal flu.”
- ✓ One shot is for H1N1 flu. Some children may need 2 H1N1 flu shots.

### Who can get flu shots?

All Albertans who are 6 months old or older can get flu shots. The shots are free.

It is very important for some people to get the H1N1 flu shot. For example:



- people with medical problems



- pregnant women



- children who are 6 months old to 5 years old

### Where can I get flu shots?

- at many public health centres
- at many doctor's offices
- at some workplaces and pharmacies

Call Health Link Alberta. They can tell you where and when to go. See page D. There is also information at:

[www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca)

### Did you know?

Flu shots do not give people the flu. Flu shots do not protect people from colds.



## 2 Clean your hands

The flu virus can live on your hands for 5 minutes. It can live on doorknobs for 1 to 2 days!

Help protect yourself and other people. Clean your hands often. Teach young children to clean their hands too.

### When to clean your hands

- ✓ after you cough, sneeze or blow your nose
- ✓ before you eat or serve food
- ✓ after you are near a person who has the flu
- ✓ before you brush your teeth

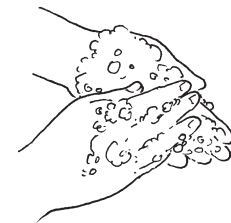
### What to use

- ✓ Use regular soap and water.
- or
- ✓ Use hand cleanser or sanitizer that has alcohol in it.



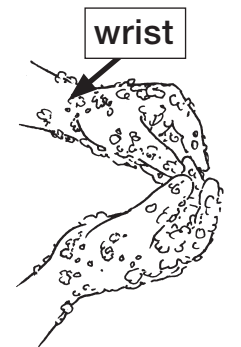
### How to wash your hands

- 1 Wet your hands with warm, running water.



- 2 Rub on regular soap. Lather well.

- 3 Rub your hands together for about 15 seconds. Rub all parts of your hands and wrists.



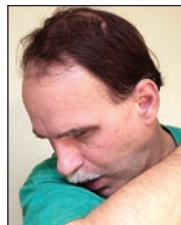
- 4 Rinse well under warm, running water.

- 5 Dry your hands with a clean towel.



## 3 Cover your cough

- ✓ Cough into your arm. Don't cough into your hand.



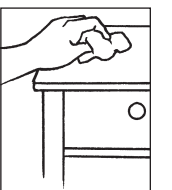
- ✓ If you use a tissue, throw it in the garbage. Then wash your hands.

## 4 Stay home

- ✓ Stay home from work and school if you are sick. Stay away from crowds.

- ✓ If someone in your home gets the flu, protect other family members.

Clean areas around the sick person often. You can use dish soap and water.



## 5 Stay well

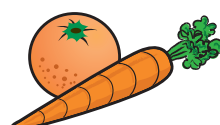
- ✓ Try to get some exercise most days. Exercise helps your body fight flu viruses.



- ✓ Drink plenty of water.



- ✓ Eat 5 to 10 servings of fruit and vegetables every day.



- ✓ Older adults can take a multivitamin.

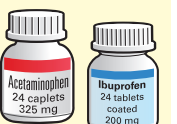
## Plan ahead

- ✓ Be prepared. What will you need if you or someone in your family gets the flu?

- a thermometer



- medicine for a fever



- throat lozenges for a sore throat



- tissues



- ✓ Do you take care of another person? Who can take care of that person if you get the flu?



# What other things can I do if I get the flu?

## Take care of yourself

✓ Rest and get lots of sleep.



✓ Drink extra water, tea and juice. Chicken soup can help too.



✓ Try to stay away from other people. Stay away until you feel better.

✓ Use a humidifier. It puts water in the air. Clean the humidifier every day.



✓ Do you have a sore throat? Gargle with warm salt water.

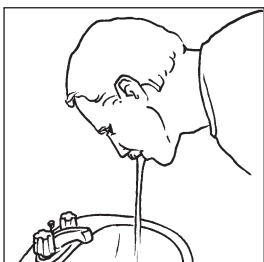
■ Mix ½ tsp. (2 mL) salt with 1 cup (250 mL) warm water.



■ Take a sip. Gargle for 10 seconds.



■ Spit out the salt water.



■ Repeat 4 or 5 times per day.

✓ Do you have a stuffy nose? Use salt-water nose drops or mist.

For example: Salinex®.



✓ You can also make nose drops.

■ Boil 1 cup (250 mL) water. Add ½ tsp. (2 mL) salt. Stir.

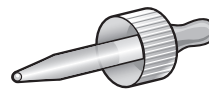
■ Cool.



■ Keep in a clean container.



■ Put drops in your nose about 3 times per day.

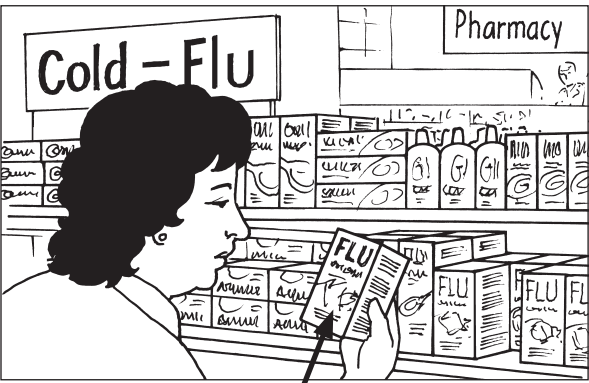


**Note:** Nasal means nose.

## Over-the-counter medicine for adults

Do you have the flu? Over-the-counter medicine can help you feel better. You don't need a prescription.

What medicine should you take? Ask a pharmacist or call Health Link Alberta. Tell them how you feel.



over-the-counter medicine

### For fever and body aches

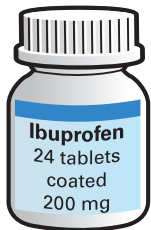


✓ Use acetaminophen. Look for Tylenol® or another brand.



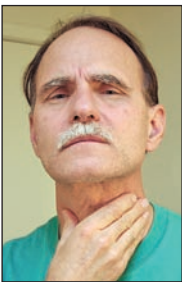
or

✓ Use ibuprofen. Look for Advil®, Motrin® or another brand.



### For a sore throat

✓ Use throat lozenges. They help numb the throat. Look for lozenges with dyclonine. For example: Sucrets®.



### For a dry cough

✓ A cough can keep you awake at night. Try cough syrup with dextromethorphan (DM).



## Be careful



### Follow instructions

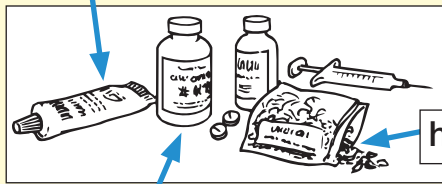
✓ Follow the instructions for medicine carefully. Talk to a pharmacist or call Health Link Alberta if you have any questions.

### Other medicines

Are you taking any other medicines? It can be dangerous to take some medicines at the same time. Talk to a pharmacist or call Health Link Alberta.

✓ Tell them the medicines you are taking. Tell them the medicines you want to take.

### prescription medicine



### herbs

### over-the-counter medicine

✓ You can ask about side effects too. For example, a medicine might give you a stomach ache.



**Keep all medicine away from children.**



# When should I see a doctor?

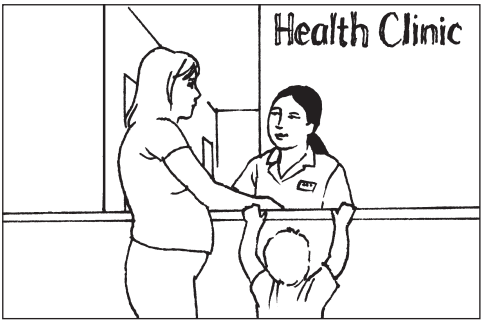
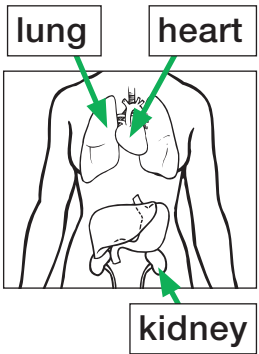
Many people get the flu every year. When should you see a doctor?



## If you have other health problems

✓ Some people should always see a doctor if they get the flu. For example:

- people with lung, heart or kidney disease
- people with diabetes
- women who are pregnant



## If you are not getting better or If your fever comes back

- ✓ You can talk to a nurse at Health Link Alberta. The nurse can give you information and advice.
- ✓ You can make an appointment with your doctor.



## If you feel very sick

- ✓ Some people get very sick when they have the flu. They have very bad symptoms. For example:
  - problems breathing
  - pain in their chest
- ✓ If you are very sick, call 9-1-1 or go to an emergency centre right away.

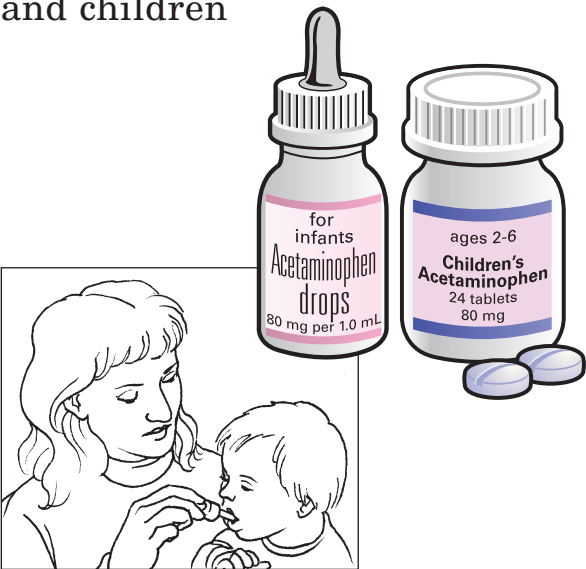


# Children and the flu

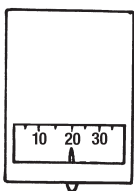
## What to do if your child has a fever

✓ First, take your child's temperature. If your child has a fever, use acetaminophen. For example:

- Tylenol® for babies (infants) and children



✓ Put light clothes on your child. Keep your child's room at about 20°C.



✓ Give water or juice to your child often. Breastfeed babies often.



## When to see a doctor

- ✓ Call 9-1-1 or go to an emergency centre right away if your child is very sick. For example:
  - Your child is not wetting as many diapers. This means your child is becoming dehydrated. (say: dee-HI-dray-did).
  - Your child has trouble breathing. But it is not just from a stuffy nose.
  - You can't wake up your child.

## Be careful

- ✗ Never give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin®) to children or teenagers who might have the flu or who have a fever.
- ✗ Health Canada has a warning about over-the-counter cough and cold medicines. Do not give them to children under 6 years old.



# Health Link Alberta

You can call Health Link Alberta. It is a free call. You can get health information and advice. You can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Nurses answer the phones. You can ask questions about the flu.



## Help in other languages

Health Link Alberta has interpreters. They speak different languages. An interpreter can be on the phone with you and the nurse. Call Health Link Alberta. Say: "I speak \_\_\_\_\_. I need an interpreter."

## Important note

- ✓ Health Link Alberta does not replace your family doctor.
- ✓ If you have a medical emergency, call 9-1-1 or go to an emergency centre right away.

## Call Health Link



In Calgary, 403-943-5465  
In Edmonton, 780-408-5465  
Outside Edmonton and Calgary, 1-866-408-5465 (free)

- ✓ Sometimes you have to wait a few minutes to talk to a nurse. Sometimes you have to leave a message. Then a nurse calls you back.
- ✓ Your call is confidential (secret). The nurse will not tell anyone what you say.

English Express is written for adults improving their English reading skills.

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