

THE CITY OF SIOUX FALLS HEALTH DEPARTMENT—PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Frequently-Asked Questions about the Flu

1. What is the difference between the regular flu, the bird flu, and a pandemic Flu?

- a. Seasonal Flu or the flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. This virus can infect your entire respiratory system, including your nose, throat, bronchial tubes, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.
- b. Avian or Bird Flu (avian influenza) is a contagious disease in birds. It can, on occasion, cause disease in other animals, including human beings.
- c. Pandemic Influenza or flu pandemics occur at times when there is a major change in the flu virus. This can lead to a high number of cases of disease, and mortality rates may also be high. Influenza pandemics spread rapidly and can travel around the world, because most humans will have no immunity to the pandemic virus.

2. Why are people concerned about the flu?

The flu virus can cause serious infections. These serious infections, such as pneumonia, can lead to hospitalization and even death. People that have weakened immune systems, such as infants, the elderly, and people with chronic health conditions are at highest risk of serious infections.

3. Can I get the flu from my flu shot?

Because the flu shot does not contain a live virus, you cannot get the flu from your flu shot.

The virus that causes the flu changes slightly each year, so you need to get your flu shot each year to try and prevent the flu. If you get your flu shot, there is no guarantee that you will not get the flu; however, the flu shot is still considered the best prevention available today. An immunized person who still gets influenza will generally have a milder case than someone who did not get a flu shot.

The CDC encourages everybody to get a flu shot. It is strongly recommended that the following groups of people get a flu shot:

- People at high risk of flu complications
- All children 6 months to 59 months (younger than 5 years) and their household contacts
- People age 50 and older
- People living in nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Adults and children 6 months of age and older that have chronic health concerns
- Women who will be pregnant during the flu season

4. When should I get my flu shot?

You may get a flu shot anytime from mid-October on. As long as there is still influenza in the area it is not too late to be immunized. It takes about two weeks for the shot to become effective in protecting you from influenza.

5. How do I know if I have the flu?

Signs and symptoms of the flu include fever, fatigue, aches, pains, chills and a cough. The symptoms of the flu can last as short as three to four days or as long as seven to ten days. The fatigue that comes with the flu can last for several weeks.

You can be infected with the flu and contagious for 24 to 72 hours before you know you are sick. You can spread the virus wherever you go during this time. It is important that you stay home while you have the flu. You will feel better sooner if you are able to get some rest.

6. Is there anything I can do to prevent the flu?

To help protect yourself from the flu, you can:

- Cough and sneeze into a tissue or into your elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, as this can help prevent germs from entering your body.
- Wash your hands frequently or use an alcohol-based gel if you don't have access to water.
- Keep shared surfaces such as phones and keyboards clean.
- Avoid crowds during the flu season.

7. Is there a treatment for the flu?

There is no “best” way to treat the flu, but there are things you can do.

- There are prescription medications that can shorten the course of the flu if you begin taking them when you first develop symptoms of the flu.
- Over-the-counter medicines can offer some relief from fever and aches. They will not cure the flu, but they can help you feel more comfortable.
- It is very important to drink a lot of fluids to keep your body hydrated. You should avoid drinking coffees, teas, and sodas with caffeine, as they can increase dehydration. For minor coughs, water and fruit juices probably help the most.

8. Will antibiotics make my flu better?

Antibiotics will not help treat the flu. The flu is caused by a virus. Antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses.

9. So, I think I have the flu. When do I need to see my doctor?

You need to see a doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Persistent fever, coughing or congestion and headaches
- If you are not able to keep fluids down
- If you experience pain in swallowing

Please remember that this is not medical advice, but general information about influenza.

