

# Home Care Guide for Flu

*This information is provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for veterans, their families, friends, volunteers, and employees. It describes symptoms of influenza (flu) and how to care for a sick person at home. It can help you decide when to stay at home or when to seek medical care.*



## Caring for a Person with Flu

- Know the common symptoms of flu and when to seek care (see page 2).
- Have the sick person rest and lie down if running a fever.
- Allow the sick person to judge what bed covers are needed; when fever is high the person may feel very cold and want more blankets.
- Use fever reducers such as acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil® or Motrin®); follow the package label or your healthcare team's direction to reduce fever, headache, and muscle, joint, or eye pain.
- Allow the sick person to drink as much as he or she can.
- Give light foods as the person wants; fluids are more important than food in the first days when the fever may be highest.
- Do not smoke around a sick person.
- Have the sick person gargle; use lozenges or hard candy for a sore throat.
- Clean your hands before and after caring for a sick person, and after coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizers. Sick people should clean their hands too!
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread this way.
- Consider wearing a mask when giving care to a sick person.

## If You Have Common Flu Symptoms

- Stay home.
- Rest.
- Drink fluids.
- Take medicines for fever such as acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil® or Motrin®).
- Call your healthcare team within 48 hours for advice about what to do next.
  - ▶ Antiviral medicines may reduce flu symptoms if started within 48 hours of your first symptoms.

**Everyone, including the sick person, should clean their hands often and cover their coughs and sneezes.**

## Helpful Supplies

- Thermometer.
- Fever reducers such as acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil® or Motrin®).
- Cough drops or cough syrup.
- Drinks: water, fruit juices, soda, tea, or fluids with electrolytes (Gatorade® or Pedialyte®). Avoid caffeine.
- Light foods: clear soups, crackers, applesauce.
- Blankets or warm covers.
- Face masks and disposable gloves.

## Stop the Spread of Flu

- **Get a flu shot.**
- **Stay home when sick.**
- **Clean your hands.**
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.**

# When to Seek Medical Care

## Call your healthcare team within 48 hours:

- If you have common flu symptoms or
- If you have moderate flu symptoms:
  - ▶ Not able to drink enough fluids  
(Dark urine or feeling dizzy when standing are signs that you are not drinking enough fluids).
  - ▶ Fever of 100° F or higher for 3 or more days.
  - ▶ Feel better, and then get a fever or sore throat again.

## Go right away for medical care:

- If you have severe flu symptoms:
  - ▶ Shortness of breath or wheezing.
  - ▶ Coughing up blood.
  - ▶ Pain or pressure in your chest when breathing.
  - ▶ Chest pain, especially if you have heart disease like angina or congestive heart failure.
  - ▶ Trouble with balance, walking or sitting up, or becoming confused.



## WARNING!

**Moderate or Severe flu symptoms are signs of complications from flu!**

## Flu vs. Cold: Know the Difference

Symptoms	Flu	Cold
Fever	Usual - 100° F or higher	Rare
Chills	Common	Uncommon
Body or muscle aches	Common – can be severe	Uncommon or mild
Headache	Common – can be severe	Uncommon
Feeling tired and weak	Common – can be severe	Sometimes – usually mild: you don't feel tired
Cough	Common – can last 2-3 weeks	Common – mild to moderate hacking
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common
Runny or stuffy nose	Sometimes	Common
Sore throat	Sometimes	Common
Chest discomfort	Common – can be severe	Sometimes – can be mild to moderate

## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

[www.prevention.va.gov/flu](http://www.prevention.va.gov/flu)  
[www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)  
[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

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