



What to do about a cold or the flu when you have asthma

When you have asthma, getting a cold or the flu can be serious

When you have asthma, the airways that carry air into your lungs tend to be swollen and irritated. If you get sick with a cold or the flu, the coughing, sneezing, and other symptoms of your illness put *extra stress* on your airways. Since your airways are already irritated and swollen from having asthma, this extra stress from having a cold or the flu can lead to *serious breathing problems* or to a *serious infection* such as pneumonia or bronchitis.

If you start feeling sick, watch for problems with asthma

When you feel stuffy from a cold or the flu, watch carefully for asthma symptoms. If asthma symptoms become serious or you have concerns about your breathing, call your doctor right away:



- Your doctor can suggest ways to help you get through your illness with less trouble. This could include how to watch for warning signs that your illness is getting worse, and what to do if you notice any of the warning signs.
- Your doctor can help you keep your asthma under control while you are getting over your illness. For example, your doctor might make changes to your asthma medicine during the time you are sick with a cold or the flu.

How do people get a cold or the flu?

A cold or the flu generally spreads from person to person.

- Often, people catch a cold or get the flu from being near someone who is coughing or sneezing.
- You can also get a cold or the flu from touching something a sick person has touched, such as doorknobs, dirty tissues, or drinking glasses.



Good health habits are important

- Washing your hands often is one of the *very best* ways to keep from getting sick. Use warm water and plenty of soap to work up a lather. Spend enough time scrubbing to get all parts of your hands really clean. It takes about 20 seconds for the soap and scrubbing action to get rid of the germs.
- Keep your fingers away from your nose, eyes, and mouth. This helps keep you from getting sick because of things you have touched. It also helps keep you from spreading your own germs to other people.
- Always cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, and throw out used tissues right away. Remind other people to do this too, especially if they are sick.
- As much as you can, stay away from people who have a cold or the flu. If you are in contact with a sick person or things they have used, wash your hands right afterwards.



➡ More about the flu on the next page

What is the flu?

The flu, or influenza, is an illness that can start very quickly and make you feel sick enough to stay in bed for a week or more. People usually get the flu during flu season (October through March of each year). People with the flu have some or all of these symptoms:



- A headache.
- A high fever (101 degrees or higher).
- Feeling very tired with aches and pains, especially in the arms, legs, and back.
- A dry cough that can be severe.
- Symptoms can also include a runny or stuffy nose and a sore throat.

Why is the flu such a big concern for people with asthma?



It's a big concern for these reasons:

- If you have asthma, having the flu can make your asthma worse.
- If you have asthma, the flu can lead to other serious illnesses that affect your airways and breathing, such as bronchitis or pneumonia.

What should you do?



- Get a flu shot every year. It's the best way to help keep from getting the flu.
- Do things that help you stay healthy, such as washing your hands often (page 1 tells about using good health habits to prevent illness).
- If you think you may be getting the flu, be sure to call your doctor right away.

Questions and answers about flu shots

Q. Who should get a flu shot?

A. People with asthma should get a flu shot every year. So should the people they live with (everyone who is six months or older). If everyone in your household gets a flu shot, you are less likely to get the flu and spread it to each other.

Q. When should you get a flu shot?

A. Get your flu shot in the Fall. It's best to get your flu shot as soon as flu shots are ready each year, which is usually in October or November. If you don't get your flu shot when flu shots are first available, try to get it as soon as you can. Even if you get your flu shot later on, it will still be helpful.

Q. Does the flu shot always work?

A. No. The flu shot *usually* works, but not every single time. While it's possible to get the flu after you've had a flu shot, you should still get a flu shot:

- Most people who get a flu shot don't get the flu.
- If you do happen to get the flu after you've had a flu shot, you may not get as sick.

Q. Can the flu shot give you the flu?

A. No, getting the flu shot will *not* give you the flu. If you get the flu after you've had a flu shot, it's just because the flu shot cannot keep you from getting the flu 100% of the time.

After you get a flu shot, it's possible that your arm might be a little sore. You might get a mild fever or aching muscles after having a flu shot, but only for a day or two.