

Protect yourself and others



What you need to know about seasonal flu (influenza)

What is flu?

The 'real' flu (influenza) is an infectious disease of the respiratory tracts. It is caused by flu viruses (influenza viruses) that mostly circulate during the cold months from December to March. Flu typically occurs as an epidemic – in other words in spatial and temporal clusters – during the winter months. Unlike many milder viral cold infections, flu can be life-threatening.

How does flu manifest itself?

Flu is often mistaken for a cold. It may also be confused with COVID-19.

Typically in flu:

- Symptoms often appear suddenly and abruptly with a feeling of being very unwell and chills
- High temperature over 38°C
- Cough (initially dry)
- Headache
- Muscle and joint pain
- Fatigue, dizziness
- Occasionally sniffles, sore throat and pain when swallowing

It is also possible to have a mild form of flu with just a few symptoms.

How flu compares to colds and COVID-19

The symptoms of many colds differ from those of flu (influenza). The typical symptoms of a cold include sniffles, a sore throat and pain when swallowing, red eyes and, in the case of children, a fever.

COVID-19 can also cause symptoms similar to those of flu. Both can in some cases cause severe and sometimes life-threatening complications, while this is very rare in colds.

How do I protect myself from flu?

Vaccination can help prevent you from getting the flu in winter. The flu vaccination only provides protection from 'real' flu (influenza), but not from COVID-19 or the colds that people get in winter. The COVID-19 vaccination doesn't protect you from the flu.

You can have a flu vaccination at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccination or before or after a COVID-19 vaccination. Get advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

The general recommendations on hygiene and behaviour help to reduce the risk of an infection with the influenza and other viruses.

What should I do if I suspect I have flu?

If you experience cold or flu symptoms, stay at home, or leave your workplace, school etc. as soon as possible and go home. This will prevent further transmission of the disease.

Avoid contact with others where possible, especially people with an increased risk of flu complications, drink plenty of fluids, and rest.

Medicines for pain and fever may relieve your symptoms; get advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

People aged over 65, pregnant women and people who suffer from a chronic illness should closely monitor their flu symptoms and call a doctor without delay if there are any problems.