

FAQ about the flu (Updated Feb 12, 2019)

Is it the flu?

During the winter months coughs, colds and flu are more common. How do you know if it is the flu, a cold or the stomach flu (stomach virus)? Patients with the flu typically have symptoms that start suddenly. Symptoms of the flu and a cold can be similar and include:

- Cough
- Runny and/or stuffy nose
- Sore throat, swollen glands
- Fatigue
- Headache

Unlike a cold, many people with the flu will have a fever (temperature above 100.3), body aches and more severe symptoms.

While some people with the flu (influenza) may have nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, these symptoms are less common. If your symptoms do NOT include head congestion, cough or runny nose, but include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and possible fever, you likely have a stomach virus, which is different than influenza.

For an interactive online assessment and tips on when to see a medical provider and self-care, please visit:

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/health-tools/search-by-symptom/cold-flu.html>

I think I might have the flu, do I need to see a medical provider?

Most healthy college students are able to recover from the flu or a cold with rest and some self-care treatments and *do not* need to see a healthcare provider. Information from the CDC on how to battle the flu or a cold at home (self-care) can be found at:

- <https://shs.wfu.edu/health-wellness-information/influenza/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/faq/what-to-do.htm>

How do I know when I do need to seek medical attention?

Some individuals have medical conditions which can increase how sick they become with the flu or other respiratory illnesses. If you have chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart problems, a weakened immune system, sickle cell anemia) or take medications that make it difficult to fight an infection, you *should schedule an appointment* to see a medical provider. Appointments can be made by calling Student Health Service (SHS) at 336-758-5218.

Other reasons *to seek medical attention* include experiencing the following symptoms:

- Fever lasting more than 2-3 days or any fever over 103 that is not relieved by acetaminophen, ibuprofen or other fever reducing medications.
- Chest pain, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing up blood

- Severe sore throat and difficulty swallowing
- Severe headache, stiff neck, dizziness
- Rash, yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Vomiting and inability to drink clear liquids to hydrate
- Symptoms lasting over 5 days without signs of improvement

I am sick, should I go to class?

The flu is highly contagious. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends that anyone with symptoms of influenza *stay home* from work and/or school until the fever associated with the illness has been resolved *for at least 24 hours*. These individuals should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

An email has been sent to all faculty advising them of this outbreak and that students should not be expected to attend class, labs, or other academic gatherings with these symptoms. Because of high demand for clinical services, students should not be required to obtain documentation of this illness from the Student Health Service; faculty are encouraged to accept the verbal report from the student.

If I am too sick to leave my room, how can I get food?

Students are recommended to remain in their rooms until their fever has been resolved for 24 hours. This means you should not go to dining service locations. Meal kits can be obtained by a friend using the sick student's meal plan. "Tickets" for the Flu meal kit program can be obtained through your RA or on the dining services website:

<https://www.deacondining.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Flu-Meal-Kit-Program-2018-2019.pdf>

I tried to make an appointment online for SHS, but there were no available appointments, does that mean I cannot be seen?

Student Health Service is making every effort to have open appointment slots for students with illness to be evaluated in a timely fashion. We are triaging appointments by telephone to ensure that we are able to provide these services.

Appointments are available. Please call (336) 758-5218 and select 0 to speak with someone in our clinic. We will work with you to find an appointment that works for you. If you have a fever, you should *remain in your room* until the time of the appointment.

I came to SHS and did not have a flu test, but don't I need one to determine if I have the flu?

Rapid flu tests are available and have some use in helping medical providers determine the cause of a patient's illness.

Unfortunately, the ability of these tests to detect the flu can vary greatly. This variation in ability to detect viruses can result in some people who are infected with the flu having a negative rapid test result. (This situation is called a false negative test result.)

The CDC is recommending that health care providers *not* rely on flu test results to treat patients who are ill with typical flu like illness. Therefore, in most cases a flu test is not necessary or recommended. For

more information from the CDC:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/testing.htm#have-flu>

I was seen in Student Health Service and diagnosed with the flu, but was not given the anti-viral medication, Tamiflu. Don't I need it to get better?

Most healthy college students are able to recover from the flu with rest and some self-care treatments and do not need to see a healthcare provider. Additionally, most college students do not need anti-viral medicines (such as Tamiflu).

CDC has the following recommendations for the use of antiviral medications for influenza:

"People at high risk of serious flu complications (such as children younger than 5 years, adults 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, people with certain long-term medical conditions, and residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities) and people who are very sick with flu (such as those hospitalized because of flu) should get antiviral drugs."

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/current.htm>

"But I heard that patients get better faster if they take antiviral medications for the flu."

- In otherwise healthy individuals, it only shortens the length of illness on average by 18 hours.
- To be effective, antiviral medications such as Tamiflu needs to be started within 48 hours of becoming ill. If taken later than this, the medication is no more effective than not taking medication.
- Side effects of antiviral medications can be significant and include nausea, vomiting, dizziness, diarrhea, headache and some behavioral side effects. These are uncommon (about 2-15% of people will experience these side effects).
- Your son or daughter's medical provider will discuss the benefit vs risk of this medication as part of their visit
- Information about antiviral medications can be found on [this CDC website](#).

What can I take to feel better?

In the majority of people, influenza, like most viral illnesses, is self-limited. This means that your own immune system will adequately combat the infection within 5-10 days. Here are some things to do to relieve the symptoms of influenza:

FEVER, HEADACHE, MUSCLE ACHES:

For fevers over 101 degrees use: Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.) or Acetaminophen (**Tylenol**). Make certain of the correct dose (400-600mg Ibuprofen with food or 650mg Acetaminophen every 4 hours but not more than 3000mg in 24 hours as needed). Avoid aspirin as this may be associated with Reye's syndrome.

FATIGUE:

Get plenty of rest—it's the most important treatment of all. Fatigue may be the last symptom to subside.

NASAL CONGESTION:

An oral decongestant (Sudafed) may decrease nasal congestion. Breathing moist air can soothe inflamed nasal passages.

SORE THROAT:

Gargle with a mixture of 1/2 tsp. salt in an 8 ounce glass of warm water every 2-4 hours to help reduce swelling, cleanse the throat, and lessen pain. Lozenges or throat sprays are also useful.

COUGH:

A cough syrup may help. However, do not overuse a cough suppressant because some cough is helpful in clearing your infection. Drink lots of fluids (the equivalent of 6 to 8 eight ounce glasses of water a day).

POOR APPETITE:

Drink plenty of fluids to soothe the throat, loosen secretions, and help relieve nasal congestion. Eat and drink healthy foods that appeals to you.

Is it too late to get a flu shot?

NO! While the flu vaccine does not give 100% protection against the flu, you should still get a flu shot. The flu season typically peaks December through February but can last until May, and it usually takes two weeks for the shot's immunity to kick in. Flu vaccines are available in the Student Health Service as well at many local pharmacies.

My roommate is ill with the flu, how can I stay healthy?

Ways to reduce your risk of catching the flu include:

1. Obtaining a flu shot if you have not already received one. Flu shots are still available at SHS Monday-Friday 9 AM- 4 PM without an appointment.
2. Good hand hygiene (frequent hand washing or use of hand sanitizers).
3. Keeping surfaces clean with products that list they kill the flu virus.
4. Flu kits are available through your RA which include face masks, hand sanitizer and information about the flu.
5. Some individuals with high risk conditions may consider using an antiviral medication to prevent the flu from a close contact. Please see information from the CDC about antiviral use below:

- http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/antiviral_factsheet1112_9-24.pdf
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/preventing.htm>

For more general information about influenza, please visit the CDC website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>