

Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in Adults
Influenza

How does influenza present in adults?

Influenza is an acute respiratory illness that typically presents with abrupt onset of fever, cough, myalgias, headache, sore throat, and malaise. Many people who are sick with influenza virus infection do not manifest fever, especially those who are **older** or **immunosuppressed**.[1]

Symptoms typically resolve after 3 to 7 days for most people, although cough and malaise can persist for >2 weeks, especially in **older people** and those with **chronic lung disease**.[1]

Key differences between cold and flu[2]

Because colds and flu share many symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone.

Signs and Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Symptom onset	Gradual	Abrupt
Fever	Rare	Usual
Aches	Slight	Usual
Chills	Uncommon	Fairly common
Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Usual
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate	Common
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Headache	Rare	Common

How does influenza impact adults?

Influenza can lead to dehydration, resulting in confusion, dizziness, and renal complications. Flu can exacerbate **underlying chronic medical conditions** (eg, heart failure, cardiovascular events (CVD), cerebrovascular accident, diabetes, COPD, asthma).[1]

Adults at higher risk of developing serious flu-related complications include those 65 years and older, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), pregnant women, and children younger than 5 years.[3]

Annual vaccination remains an important tool to reduce this burden. For the 2023-2024 season, flu vaccination was estimated to prevent about **9.8 million flu-related illnesses, 4.8 million medical visits, 120,000 hospitalizations,** and **7,900 deaths** in the United States.[4]

Who should receive the influenza vaccine?[5]

Routine annual influenza vaccination is recommended for all adults without contraindications

The CDC recommends:

- Any age-appropriate inactivated or recombinant flu vaccine
- For adults ≥65 years, preferentially offer high-dose inactivated, adjuvanted inactivated, or recombinant influenza vaccine
- For most adults (particularly those aged ≥65 years) and during the first or second trimester of pregnancy, vaccination during July and August should be avoided unless there is concern that later vaccination might not be possible
- Flu vaccination during July and August can be considered during the third trimester of pregnancy
- Flu vaccine can be given at the same visit as other vaccines (eg, COVID-19, RSV, shingles). Consider using non-adjuvanted influenza vaccine if giving another vaccine with non-aluminum adjuvant simultaneously (but vaccination should not be delayed to obtain a non-adjuvanted influenza vaccine)

As a healthcare professional, your strong recommendation is a critical factor in whether your patients get an influenza vaccine

CDC=Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; COPD=chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; RSV=respiratory syncytial virus.

References: 1. Clinical signs and symptoms of influenza. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed August 8, 2024. Accessed November 18, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/flu/hcp/clinical-signs/index.html **2.** Cold versus flu. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed August 8, 2024. Accessed November 26, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/coldflu.html **3.** People at increased risk for flu complications. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed September 11, 2024. Accessed December 24, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/index.html **4.** Flu burden prevented by vaccination 2023-2024 flu season. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed January 14, 2025. Accessed November 18, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/flu-burden/php/data-vis-vac/2023-2024-prevented.html **5.** Influenza (flu): ACIP Recommendations Summary. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed August 28, 2025. Accessed November 18, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/flu/hcp/acip/index.html

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