



aaaaah choooo!

good hygiene key to fending off influenza

Although most patients recover from a bout of the flu without treatment, thousands of Americans die from it each year. Influenza is a serious infection — but it can be prevented and treated.

In the United States, the flu season runs roughly from Thanksgiving to Easter. In a typical year, up to 10% of Americans get the flu, over 200,000 are sick enough to require hospitalization, and about 36,000 die from the infection. This toll can double during epidemics, which occur every 10 to 15 years.

The best way to avoid suffering flu symptoms this winter is an ounce of prevention, starting with good hygiene:

- **Wash your hands.** Alcohol-based hand rubs and gels containing 60% to 95% isopropanol or ethanol are best, but ordinary soap and water will also help.
- **Keep your distance.** The flu is most contagious within three feet of an infected person.

- **Wear a mask** if you are in a high-risk group and you can't avoid close contact with possible flu victims.

- **Don't go to work or school if you have the flu.** Another preventive step is immunization, which can reduce your risk of catching the flu by up to 80%. Scientists must develop a new flu vaccine each year because the virus is always changing, so to prevent this year's flu, you'll need a new shot. In the United States, October and November are the ideal months to get vaccinated. And if you're late in getting your immunization this year, two medications can help prevent infection — talk to your doctor about your options. These medications can also ease flu symptoms, if you start taking them early in the illness.

-Harvard University

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