

**What is the flu?** Influenza is a contagious viral infection that causes cough, fever, body aches, headache, and (less commonly) sore throat and runny nose. The most common type of flu is the “seasonal” flu (Influenza A or B), which generally occurs during fall and winter months. The symptoms of the flu usually lasts 1-2 weeks.

**Is there a flu test?** Influenza is commonly diagnosed by your doctor based upon your symptoms, but lab testing for influenza is can be done in the office, although it is a more expensive test to run than most. The influenza test currently wholesales for around \$21 per test. At Holton Direct Care, we generally perform this test only during new influenza outbreaks and for patients who are at an increased risk for complications. Because the treatment is usually the same for most patients regardless of if they’re “officially” diagnosed with the infection, we avoid exposing our patients to the extra cost.

**How can I avoid getting the flu?** Wash your hands frequently with soap and water and use alcohol hand sanitizer frequently. Get the yearly flu vaccine. Avoid other sick people.

**Should I get the flu shot and is it safe?** Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received the flu vaccines over the years and there has been extensive research to support the safety of the flu vaccine. However the efficacy (how well it prevents the flu) of the flu shot is very much in doubt. Current research indicates it may only decrease your chance of getting the flu by 4%, which is not good at all. The most common side effects of the flu vaccine (due to your immune system’s response to the shot) are headache, fever, nausea, soreness from the shot, and muscle aches. So although it is a safe vaccine, it is unlikely to actually significantly reduce your chance of getting the flu. And no, the flu vaccine cannot cause the flu.

**How do I treat the flu?** Antiviral medicines such as Tamiflu may be used within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms. These medications do not cure the flu, but can modestly reduce the severity and duration of symptoms by about 18 hours or so (i.e. they don’t help very much). These medications are expensive, and have possible side effects. For this reason, we generally only recommend them to those at higher risk from flu infection. We recommend that you treat flu symptoms while your immune system catches up. Treatments include: plenty of rest, fluids, and ibuprofen and tylenol for fever. *Never treat children with Aspirin when they have a viral infection!*

**When should I seek help for my child?** A child with any of these symptoms should seek medical attention: blue skin color, fever with rash, does not wake up easily, not urinating at least 4 times a day, and if infant is irritable to the point that he/she does not want to be held. Also, if a child/adult has shortness of breath, chest pain, stomach pain, confusion, or can’t stop vomiting, they should seek medical attention.

**People really die from the flu?** It is possible to die from the flu; however, almost all people get over the flu on their own. Deadly complications like pneumonia usually occur in the very young (<2 years old), older adults (≥ 65 years old), pregnant women, and those with asthma, COPD, heart disease, or a weakened immune system.

**My neighbor was prescribed antibiotics for her flu, so what’s up with that?** Antibiotics are NOT useful for treating viral infections like the flu, and can actually cause additional severe problems. Antibiotics can be used if flu complications occur such as bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, or sinusitis.