

Flu season remains active

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It might be closer to spring than winter, but it's still flu season. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that there will be 34 million flu illnesses and 350,000 hospitalizations, as well as 20,000 deaths from the flu for the 2019-2020 season. The number of deaths include 136 children.

"If you have not been vaccinated for influenza, it's not too late," says Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist. Influenza activity usually peaks between December and February, but can last as late as May.

"We have a flu vaccine that can prevent influenza illness," says Dr. Rajapakse. "We know that having the vaccine decreases your chance of severe illness, it decreases your chances of having to be admitted to a hospital or an ICU because of the influenza infection, and it decreases your chance of dying. It's still really important that everyone get the flu vaccine, and the [flu vaccine](#) is recommended for anyone over 6 months of age."

Influenza A viruses are now the dominant strain in circulation.

"The [flu season](#) started with a wave of influenza B, which tends to affect children," Dr. Rajapakse says. "Because there's not as much change in influenza B over time, most older people and adults have been infected with influenza B strains in the past, and have some protection. But children, unfortunately, don't have that benefit. Influenza B strains tend to affect [younger children](#) more seriously than others."

Common flu symptoms include:

- Fever above 100 F (38 C), though not everyone with the flu has a fever
- A cough or sore throat
- A runny or stuffy nose
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea (most common in children)

Most healthy people who become sick with the flu will recover on their own. Young children; the elderly; pregnant women; and people with underlying medical conditions, including diabetes, lung disease, or a weakened immune system, may experience complications and may benefit from treatment with an antiviral medication (oseltamivir), especially if it is started early in the course of their illness. If you or someone you're caring for is at high risk of flu-related complications and you suspect the flu, call your [health care provider](#).

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