

When to see a doctor for the flu

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You're feeling under the weather, but is it a cold or the flu? Sometimes it's hard to tell initially, and even more difficult to decide if you should make an appointment with your doctor. One Baylor College of Medicine expert said you should make an appointment immediately if you have flu-like symptoms such as a fever, sore throat, cough, body aches, chills and fatigue or weakness.

"During the clinic visit, we are able to perform a rapid flu test to determine if you are positive for influenza. It's always best to see your doctor quickly so that you can benefit from anti-viral treatment such as Tamiflu, but I would recommend that regardless of the length of time that you have been experiencing symptoms, go see your doctor," said Dr. Carmen Robinson, assistant professor of family and community medicine at Baylor.

Robinson explained that Tamiflu is a medication that prevents the [influenza virus](#) from replicating in the body, and it can shorten the duration of the flu if given within the first 48 hours of symptoms. If someone in your household has been diagnosed with the flu, it also is recommended that you and other household contacts be treated

prophylactically with the same medication, Robinson said.

However, if you are unable to see your doctor, Robinson recommends for you to rest and drink lots of fluids.

"You want to make sure you are staying very well hydrated because one of the top reasons for hospitalizations for persons that have the flu is dehydration," she said.

Robinson said that on those days that you are feeling particularly badly, you should stay home and not go to work or school, especially if you have a fever or are coughing and sneezing because that is how the flu is transmitted, and it is most likely how somebody transmitted it to you.

To decrease the chance of transmitting the flu to others, you should make sure you cough and sneeze into the crook of your elbow and not into your hands, Robinson said. But if you are going to use your hands, use a tissue or napkin and make sure you wash your hands frequently.

Robinson also emphasized that it is important to get your flu shot even if it is late in the [flu season](#).

"The [flu strain](#) this year is pretty significant but the evidence has shown that the flu shot can cut your risk down by nearly half," she said.

Robinson warned that the people who are at the highest risk of complications from the flu include those with asthma, COPD, emphysema, diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDs, and cancer. She added that adults 65 years and older, pregnant women, children younger than five and those who have had an organ transplant also are at a higher risk for complications from the flu.

"Even if you do not qualify as a person in these populations, it is important for you to get the [flu shot](#) because you may also be protecting these people who are at high risk for complications," Robinson

said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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