

As cooler temperatures settle in throughout much of the country, the chance of catching the flu is going up. About five to 20 percent of the population gets the flu each year and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized because of flu-related complications, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More than 20,000 people die each year.

“Everyone, especially those over age 65, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women and young children need to take steps now to help prevent the flu or at least decrease its severity,” said Dr. David Seaberg, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. The flu is caused by a virus and is spread from person to person by direct contact or through virus-infected droplets coughed or sneezed in the air. Most people recover completely in one or two weeks, but some develop serious and potentially life-threatening illness, such as pneumonia.

Flu symptoms tend to develop between one and four days after a person is exposed to the virus, and people are contagious 24 hours before they become ill.

Symptoms of influenza include: high fever, headache, extreme fatigue, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, diarrhea, vomiting, dizziness and chills.

Call a doctor right away if there are signs of dehydration, seizures, ear ache or a cough that produces discolored mucus. Seek emergency care if there is difficulty breathing, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion or severe vomiting.

If a child’s symptoms get worse over several days and if they have a temperature greater than 102° F for more than a few days, see a doctor. If flu symptoms develop, get plenty of rest, drink clear fluids such as water, broth, sports drinks, or electrolyte beverages made for infants to prevent becoming dehydrated.

The best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated every year. Now is the best time to do that.

For more information on colds and flu go to [www.EmergencyCareForYou.org](http://www.EmergencyCareForYou.org)