

Teacher Facts about the Flu

#1 F The flu vaccine can give you the flu.

It's impossible.

Injected flu vaccines only contain dead virus, and a dead virus is, well, dead: it can't infect you. There is one type of live virus flu vaccine, the nasal vaccine, FluMist. But in this case, the virus is specially engineered to remove the parts of the virus that make people sick.

#2 T There is treatment for the flu.

Two antiviral drugs are highly effective against the flu: Tamiflu, in pill form, and Relenza, which is inhaled. These drugs are most effective if taken within 48 hours of your first flu symptoms. But the drugs are beneficial even if taken 48 hours after symptom onset.

Neither Tamiflu nor Relenza cures the flu. But they can reduce the amount of time you're sick by one or two days and make you less contagious to others. These drugs work with both the typical strains of seasonal flu as well as swine flu.

#3 F Antibiotics can fight the flu.

Antibiotics only fight bacterial infections. The flu is a virus. So antibiotics have *absolutely no effect* on any kind of flu. However, there are instances of flu complications that involve bacterial infection. The flu virus can weaken your body and allow bacterial invaders to infect you. Secondary bacterial infections to the flu include bronchitis, ear infections, sinusitis, and most often, pneumonia.

4 T “Stomach flu” is a not a form of influenza.

The word “flu” is so overused that it’s lost much of its actual meaning. Gastrointestinal viruses are called the “stomach flu,” but they have no connection to the actual influenza virus. If you suffer vomiting and diarrhea, but no fever or body ache, you probably do not have the flu.

Keep in mind: in children, the influenza virus *can sometimes* cause vomiting and diarrhea. But when it comes to typical seasonal flu, vomiting and diarrhea are rare in adults.

#5 F The flu is only dangerous for the elderly.

It’s true that the people most likely to become seriously ill or die from the seasonal flu are over age 65. But flu can become risky for anyone, even healthy young adults. Some of the most susceptible people to seasonal influenza are young children. Children under 2 years have some of the highest rates of hospitalization from the flu. Children under 6 months are at the most risk from the seasonal flu because they’re too young to get the vaccine.

#6 T You should get the flu shot every year.

Experts say that some of us don’t understand that we need a new seasonal flu vaccine every year. Why? The particular strains of flu that are dominant change every single year. So every single year, researchers have to develop a brand new vaccine.

#7 F Cold weather causes the flu.

No matter what your grandmother may have said, going outside in the winter hatless does not increase your risk of flu. While there might seem to be a connection -- since flu season coincides with colder

months in Canada. -- there isn't. After all, flu season is the same for hot Florida and cold Winnipeg. Colder weather might increase the risk of flu in one way: We might come into closer contact with other people because we're all stuck inside. That could make it easier for the virus to spread.

#8 F Vaccines are dangerous.

In recent years, there's been growing mistrust of vaccines, including the flu vaccine. Some believe that there could be a link between vaccines -- specifically the ingredient thimerosal -- and developmental disorders in children, like autism. However, there is no evidence that vaccines cause autism, and experts say that we're losing sight of how important vaccines are. Vaccines prevent more illness and death than any treatment

#9 F You must have the flu shot by November.

If you have not had a chance to get the flu shot and it is the beginning of December that is okay. In fact you should be able to get it as late as December or January. Besides, the flu often doesn't hit its peak until February or sometimes as late as March. So no matter the month, if you haven't had your flu vaccine yet, go get it.

#10 F The flu is annoying but harmless.

The seasonal flu can be a serious condition. A lot of people just think of the flu as a very bad cold. But it's much worse than that. For one, you usually feel *terrible*. In addition to the congestion and cough, you're apt to have nasty body aches and fever, which are less likely with a cold. Aside from the short-term misery and lost workdays, flu can have more serious implications. As many as 10% to 25% Canadians get the flu each year and an estimated 500-1500 Canadians, mostly

seniors, die every year from pneumonia related to flu and many others may die from other serious complications of flu.

#11 F If you get the flu, you can't get it again

Many people assume that if they've had the flu recently, they can't get it again -- and thus don't need to get the vaccine. That's not the case because flu infection can happen from more than one strain of virus. In any flu season, there's usually both Type A and Type B influenza in circulation. You can get one type and then the other. So even if you have had the flu you should still get the flu shot.

#12 F The flu vaccine is expensive.

In Canada the flu vaccine is free.