

## **Can I get the flu from the flu vaccine?**

No, the flu vaccine given at Northwestern Medicine does not carry a live virus. It contains inactivated or weakened organisms. It takes up to two weeks to develop antibodies to protect against the flu. That means you are at risk of getting the flu during the two weeks it takes for the vaccine to become effective. The more people who get vaccinated against the flu every year, the lower the risk of catching the flu.

## **Who is required to participate in the annual flu vaccination campaign?**

The following individuals are required to participate in the annual flu vaccination campaign:

- All regular, full-time, part-time and casual employees of Northwestern Memorial HealthCare and its subsidiaries and affiliates
- All non-employed individuals, such as agency staff, contractors, vendors, students, residents and medical staff members with privileges, who come on-site to an NM facility between October 1 and May 1

## **How do I participate in the annual flu vaccination campaign?**

To be considered compliant for the flu season, you must either:

- Get vaccinated by a flu prevention captain
- Get vaccinated outside of the provided flu stations, such as through your primary care physician, Walgreens or another employer, and provide proof
- Submit an approved accommodation form by **December 1**

## **Why should I get the flu vaccine?**

Influenza (the flu) can be a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death.

- You can get the flu from anyone, including patients and co-workers who are sick with the flu.
- If you get the flu, you can spread it to others even if you don't feel sick. In fact, you are contagious 24 hours before your symptoms appear.
- Getting vaccinated helps protect you, your family, co-workers and patients from getting the flu.

## **Are there preservatives in the flu vaccine?**

The single-dose flu vaccine is preservative-free. Multi-dose vials contain preservatives to safeguard against possible contamination of the vial once it is opened. NM offers only single-dose flu vaccines for all employees and non-employees.

## **Can I have the live nasal flu vaccine?**

Northwestern Medicine does not offer the live influenza vaccine. Documentation of the live vaccine will be accepted as proof of influenza vaccination. Please note that you should not participate in the care of anyone who is immunosuppressed for seven days after receiving the nasal flu vaccine because you may be shedding the virus.

## **When is the best time to get vaccinated?**

Flu vaccines can be given as early as July for the upcoming flu season and can protect an individual throughout the duration of flu season (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) from the most common flu strains of that season. Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.

## How do I prevent the flu?

**Get a flu vaccine.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the most important step in preventing influenza infection. Flu vaccines protect against three or four different flu viruses. Even with reduced vaccine effectiveness, vaccination may still prevent some flu illnesses, medical visits and hospitalizations. And research suggests that even if someone gets sick after vaccination, their illness may be milder.

## Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- During the current COVID-19 pandemic, follow CDC guidance to wear a mask when unable to maintain physical distancing. While at work, follow NM's mask policy. This may also help protect against contracting the flu.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them with the flu.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, except to get medical care or other necessities. (Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.

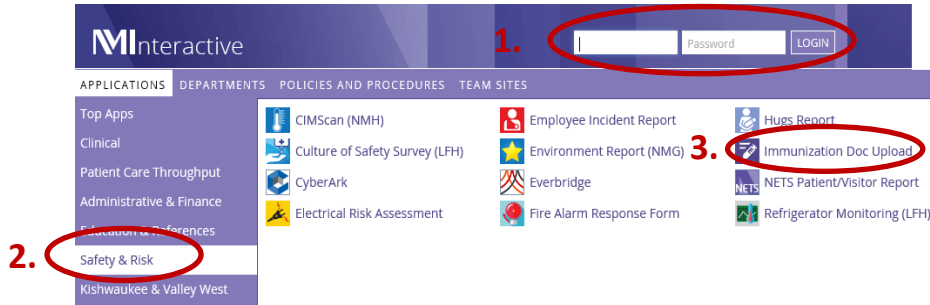
## Take flu antiviral medications if your physician prescribes them.

- If you get the flu, antiviral medications can be used to treat your illness.
- Antiviral medications are different from antibiotics. They are only available by prescription (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) and not available over the counter.
- Antiviral medications can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
- CDC recommends rapid antiviral treatment in people who are very sick with flu or people who develop flu symptoms and are at high risk of serious flu complications.
- Treatment with an antiviral medication can mean the difference between having a milder illness versus a very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay.
- Studies show that flu antiviral medications work best for treatment when they are started within two days of getting sick, but starting them later can still be helpful, especially if the person has a high-risk health condition or is very sick from the flu. Follow your physician's instructions for taking this medication.
- Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

## What if I received the flu vaccine from my NM physician, Walgreens or another healthcare provider?

Individuals who were vaccinated outside of the annual campaign need to submit proof of vaccination directly into the system by logging in to NMI and following the path outlined below:

*NMI > Applications > Safety & Risk > Immunization Doc Upload*



**Step 1:** Log in to NMI

**Step 2:** Scroll under **Applications** and click on **Safety and Risk**

**Step 3:** Click on **Immunization Doc Upload**

## Immunization Documentation Upload - Employee Roster



You can upload immunization documentation on behalf of any of your direct reports.

[Click here](#) to upload immunization documentation for yourself.

Employee Name:

Employee ID:

**Search**

**Step 4:** Click on the **Click here** link to upload immunization documentation on behalf of yourself or any of your direct reports.

## How do I know if I have the flu, a common cold or COVID-19?

	INFLUENZA	COMMON COLD	COVID-19
Fever	Usual, lasts 3 – 4 days	Rare	Common
Aches	Usual, often severe	Slight	Usual, often severe
Chills	Fairly common	Uncommon	Fairly common
Fatigue, weakness	Usual	Sometimes	Usual
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common	Sometimes
Stuffy nose	Sometimes	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Sometimes	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Common, can be severe	Mild to moderate, hacking cough	Common, can be severe
Headache	Common	Rare	Common
New loss of taste or smell	Rare	Rare	Fairly common
Gastrointestinal symptoms, including nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea	Sometimes	Rare	Sometimes

## What are symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI)?

Individuals who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults)

## **Can I work if I have symptoms of ILI?**

**NO.** Although all individuals must work with a mask on during the current COVID-19 pandemic, if you have an influenza-like illness, do not report to work.

Influenza, COVID-19 and various respiratory viruses are highly contagious and can spread to both patients and co-workers. Most respiratory symptoms that are not influenza or COVID-19 usually resolve within two to three days, while symptoms related to influenza or COVID-19 typically last longer. You can transmit the influenza virus a day before becoming ill and for five to seven days after symptoms start.

Individuals who are exhibiting symptoms of ILI at work should be sent home. Individuals should be expected to remain off work for 24 hours after symptoms are greatly improved and their fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol®, in accordance with CDC guidelines. Individuals should be cleared to return to work through the NM COVID-19 Hotline (312.472.6843).

## **What do I do if I am at work and become ill?**

- If you become ill at work with ILI symptoms, please inform your manager and go home. Call the COVID-19 Hotline at 312.47.COVID (312.472.6843) to discuss next steps and arrange for COVID-19 or other respiratory testing.
- It is assumed that you have flu or COVID-19 and cannot return to work in any unit until you have significantly improved, unless the testing is negative for influenza and COVID-19 infection is ruled out.

## **What do I do if I am at home and become ill?**

- If you are at home, please do not report to work.
- If you have not been tested and you are significantly better (including being fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication), you should call the COVID-19 Hotline at 312.47.COVID (312.472.6843) to receive swabs to rule out influenza and/or COVID-19.
  - If the swab is negative for influenza and COVID-19 and you have improved significantly, you may return to work.
  - If the swab is positive for influenza, you will not be able to work in a high-risk unit for seven days. You may return to work in other clinical areas and non-patient-care areas once your symptoms have significantly improved and you are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
  - If the swab is positive for COVID-19, you will not be able to work in any unit for at least 10 days, depending on your medical history.

## **When can I return to work?**

If you have ILI symptoms, you may return to work when cleared to work by the COVID-19 Hotline. The COVID-19 Hotline staff will assess whether or not you have a COVID-19 infection. Through the COVID-19 Hotline, individuals with an ILI that is not COVID-19 will be cleared to return to work based on whether they are involved in direct patient care, and if so, which unit they work on. If you miss more than three days of work, you may be eligible for Family and Medical Leave (FML). The phone number for Sedgwick, the FML claims administrator for NM, is 312.926.3652 (6FMLA) or 866.807.0789. You may also discuss with your manager whether working remote is an option for you.

### **Do I need to be seen in person to return to work?**

During the 2020 – 2021 flu season, if you have influenza-like symptoms, you should call the COVID-19 Hotline. The clinical team on the COVID-19 Hotline will decide whether any testing should be performed and the steps to follow for you to be cleared to work.

### **How do I know if I have the flu?**

Flu viruses usually cause the most illness during the colder months of the year. However, influenza can also occur outside of the typical flu season. In addition, other viruses can cause respiratory illness similar to the flu. Your respiratory illness might be the flu if you have fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and/or fatigue. You may have vomiting and diarrhea. You may be infected with the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

It is impossible to tell for sure if you have the flu based on symptoms alone. If your physician needs to know for sure whether you have the flu, laboratory tests can be ordered.

### **How contagious is the flu?**

Most healthy adults may be able to infect other people beginning one day before symptoms develop and five to seven days **after** becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than seven days. Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may spread the virus to others.

Symptoms start one to four days after the virus enters the body. **That means you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**

### **Why do the high-risk units have more restrictions to return from influenza?**

High-risk units have patients whose condition places them at increased risk from all infections, including respiratory illnesses that may seem benign (such as symptoms of the common cold). On these units, you are not permitted to work if you have any symptoms of flu.

High-risk units include solid organ transplant and stem cell transplant units at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. Other units may be declared high-risk units at the discretion of Infection Prevention at each NM institution.

### **What kinds of flu tests are available?**

A number of flu tests are available to detect influenza viruses in respiratory specimens. The most common are rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDTs). RIDTs work by detecting the parts of the virus (antigens) that stimulate an immune response. These tests can provide results within approximately 10 to 15 minutes, but are not as accurate as other flu tests. Therefore, you could still have the flu, even though your rapid test result is negative. Other flu tests are called rapid molecular assays, and they detect genetic material of the virus. Rapid molecular assays produce results in 15 to 20 minutes and are more accurate than RIDTs.

Several more-accurate and sensitive flu tests are available, but they must be performed in specialized laboratories, such as those found in hospitals or state public health laboratories. All of these tests require that a healthcare provider swipe the inside of your nose or the back of your throat with a swab and then send the swab for testing. Results may take anywhere from one to several hours.

## How well can rapid tests detect the flu?

During an influenza outbreak, a positive rapid flu test is likely to indicate influenza infection. However, rapid tests vary in their ability to detect flu viruses, depending on the type of rapid test used, and on the type of flu viruses circulating. Also, rapid tests appear to be better at detecting flu in children than adults. This variation in ability to detect viruses can result in some people who are infected with the flu having a negative rapid test result. (This situation is called a false negative test result.) Despite a negative rapid test result, your healthcare provider may diagnose you with flu based on your symptoms and their clinical judgment.

## Will my healthcare provider test me for flu if I have flu-like symptoms?

Not necessarily. Most people with flu symptoms are not tested because the test results usually do not change how you are treated. Your healthcare provider may diagnose you with flu based on your symptoms and their clinical judgment, or they may choose to use an influenza diagnostic test. During an outbreak of respiratory illness, testing for flu can help determine if flu viruses are the cause of the outbreak. Flu testing can also be helpful for some people with suspected flu who are pregnant or have a weakened immune system, and for whom a diagnosis of flu can help their physician make decisions about their care.

## What do I do if I have a medical reason or a religious belief that prevents me from getting the flu vaccination?

Individuals who would like an accommodation from the annual vaccination requirement due to a medical or religious reason must apply for a Medical or Religious Accommodation by completing the electronic NM Accommodation Request Form. The link to this electronic form is located on NMI: **MyNM Service Center > Health & Safety > Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Program > NM Accommodation Form** (pictured below).

