

## 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 groups (i.e. agency staff, contractors, vendors, students, residents, medical staff members with privileges) that come onsite to a NM facility between Oct 1-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.
- Attend a mass vaccination clinic at a NM hospital
- Get vaccinated outside of the provided flu stations (i.e: 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 coworkers who are sick with the flu.
- If you get the flu, you can spread it to others even if you don't feel sick. You are contagious 24 hours before your symptoms appear.
- Getting vaccinated helps, you can protect yourself, your family, coworkers 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, 2021– June 30, 2022) 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?

- 1. Get a flu vaccine:** 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. Research studies also suggest that even if someone gets sick after vaccination, their illness may be milder.
- 2. 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 social 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.
  - 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.
- 3. Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them:**
  - If you get the flu, antiviral drugs can be used to treat your illness.
  - Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics. They are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) and are not available over-the-counter.
  - Antiviral drugs 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 are at high risk of serious flu complications who develop flu symptoms.
  - Treatment with an antiviral drug 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 drugs 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 sick person has

## FAQ About Seasonal Flu

a high-risk health condition or is very sick from the flu. Follow your doctor’s instructions for taking this drug.

- 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 by 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 into NMI and following the path outlined below: ***NMI>Applications>Safety & Risk>Immunization Doc Upload***

### How do I know if it is the flu vs. a common cold vs. 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 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)

### **What if I am sick with Influenza-Like-Illness?**

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. During the current pandemic, you should also be evaluated for COVID-19. If you are positive for COVID-19, you will need to stay out longer than 24 hours. If you are symptomatic with ILI symptoms, you should fill out the Hotline Triage Questionnaire under “Current Symptoms”, or call the COVID Hotline at 312-47-COVID to decide next steps and/or receive an order for testing.

**Can I work while symptomatic?** **NO:** Although all individuals must work with a mask on during the current COVID-19 pandemic, if you are ill with influenza-like-illness, please do not report to work.

Influenza, COVID-19 and the other respiratory viruses are highly contagious and can spread to both patients and fellow coworkers. 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 may last longer. A fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol®.

It is possible to transmit the influenza virus for a couple of days prior to 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 their fever is gone and symptoms greatly improved, in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and should be cleared through the COVID Hotline Triage Questionnaire or by calling the COVID hotline. If your answers indicate that you should be tested for COVID-19 and/or influenza, an order will be placed for you. You should make sure that you are signed up for MyNM so that you can see when your order is placed for COVID/influenza testing and your results. Even if your COVID/influenza result is negative, you will need to have improved symptoms, be fever free and cleared through the Hotline Triage Questionnaire or the COVID Hotline to return to work. If you are unable to complete the questionnaire, you should call the COVID Hotline for next steps and possible testing.

### **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. Complete the Hotline Triage Questionnaire on NMI and follow the instructions. If your answers indicate that you should be tested for COVID and/or influenza, an order will be placed for you. You should make sure that you are signed up for My Chart so that you can see when your order is placed for COVID/influenza testing and your results. Even if your COVID/influenza result is negative, you will need to have improved symptoms, be fever free and cleared through the Hotline Triage Questionnaire or the COVID Hotline. If you are unable to complete the questionnaire, you should call the COVID Hotline for next steps and

possible testing.

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

If you are at home, please do not report to work. Complete the Hotline Triage Questionnaire on NMI and follow the instructions. If your answers indicate that you should be tested for COVID and/or influenza, an order will be placed for you. You should make sure that you are signed up for MyNM so that you can see when your order is placed for COVID/influenza testing and your results. Even if your COVID/influenza result is negative, you will need to have improved symptoms, be fever free and cleared through the Hotline Triage Questionnaire or the COVID Hotline. If you are unable to complete the questionnaire, you should call the COVID Hotline for next steps and possible testing.

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

Employees who have ILI symptoms may return to work when cleared to work by the COVID-19 hotline team. You should complete a COVID Hotline Questionnaire following the prompts for “Resolved Symptoms”. If you are unable to fill out a questionnaire, you can call the COVID hotline to discuss your return to work. The COVID-19 hotline will assess whether or not you have a COVID-19 infection. Through the COVID-19 hotline process, individuals with other ILI will be returned to work based on whether they have direct patient care, and if so, which unit they work on. If an employee is out more than three days, remember to advise them that they may be eligible for Family and Medical Leave (FMLA). The phone number for Sedgwick, our FMLA claims administrator, is 312.926.3652 (6FMLA) or 866.807.0789. You may also discuss with your manager if working remote is an option for you.

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

During the upcoming 2021-2022 season, if you have influenza-like symptoms, you should call the COVID-19 hotline or complete the COVID Hotline Triage Questionnaire. 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?** 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. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever. 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 also cause respiratory illness similar to the flu. It is impossible to tell for sure if you have the flu based on symptoms alone. If your doctor needs to know for sure whether you have the flu, there are laboratory tests that can be done.

**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. 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.** Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those

persons may spread the virus to others.

**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 with any symptoms. High-risk units are defined as the following areas: solid organ transplant and stem cell transplant units at NMH. Other units may be declared a high-risk unit at the discretion of Infection Prevention at each NM institution.

**What kinds of flu tests are there?** A number of flu tests are available to detect influenza viruses in respiratory specimens. The most common are called “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 10-15 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” that detect genetic material of the virus. Rapid molecular assays produce results in 15-20 minutes and are more accurate than RIDTs. In addition, there are several more-accurate and sensitive flu tests available that 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 one hour or 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 health care 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 doctor 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 (below)*:

# FAQ About Seasonal Flu

## Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Overview

• 📅 4d ago • 👁 12 Views • ★★★★★

Complete NM Employee Flu Consent Form online before receiving flu vaccine.

[Flu Consent Form](#)

### If you received a flu vaccination elsewhere:

Please [upload your flu documentation here](#).

Examples include receiving flu vaccination from the following:

- NM physician
- Pharmacy (Walgreens, CVS, etc.)
- Another healthcare organization
- Personal healthcare provider

### If you cannot receive the flu vaccination due to religion or a medical condition

Please [complete the NM Accommodation Form](#).