



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Flu Season in SLO County: What You Need to Know

When is the flu season?

The flu season generally begins in October or November, peaks between December and February, and can last as late as May. Currently in SLO County, the flu season is well underway. Local healthcare providers are seeing an increased number of flu cases, and these numbers are expected to continue increasing. Health officials believe the local flu season has not yet peaked. This makes it especially important to take steps to protect yourself and those around you.

I've heard this is going to be a bad year for the flu. Is that true in SLO County?

Yes. Across SLO County, we're seeing more confirmed cases of the flu than usual, and more people are visiting the emergency room because of the flu. (Flu is not a reportable illness, so the Public Health Department does not track exact numbers of cases.) In reality, every year is a bad flu year for the people who get sick.

Who is most at risk?

Some people are especially at risk for serious complications from the flu. This includes:

- Older adults—over age 65
- Young children—under age five, and especially under age two
- Pregnant women
- People with other health conditions like heart or lung disease

It's important for people at risk of serious complications—and the people who spend time with them—to protect themselves from the flu. It's also important to remember that even young, healthy people can sometimes experience serious complications.

What should I do if I have the flu?

- **Stay home.** If you get sick with flu symptoms, in most cases, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible. Rest, stay hydrated, and take temperature-reducing medicines (such as Tylenol or ibuprofen) as needed.
- **Keep it to yourself.** Don't share the flu. Wash your hands often and use a tissue to cover your cough or sneeze. Avoid spending time with other people, especially those who are at risk for serious complications of the flu. This may mean you need to delay a visit or a meeting.
- **Look out for signs that it may be more serious.** In most cases, you do not need medical care or prescription medicine to recover from the flu. However, some cases can be more serious. Keep reading for signs that you may need to see a healthcare provider.

County of San Luis Obispo Health Agency

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Should I go to the emergency room if I have the flu?

In most cases of the flu, it's best to recover on your own at home. You probably don't want to spend time in the waiting room to see the doctor only to be told in most cases to rest, hydrate and take fever-relieving medication. Such visits to the ER may also expose you and those who accompany you to other flu patients or other contagious diseases.

However, flu can be dangerous and even healthy people can sometimes experience serious complications. If you experience any of these symptoms when you have the flu, seek medical attention immediately:

- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or severe abdominal pain
- Confusion
- Sudden dizziness
- Severe vomiting or vomiting that won't stop

If you are caring for someone who has the flu, be aware of these emergency signs and help the person seek medical attention if needed.

If you do not have these symptoms but are concerned, call your regular healthcare provider.

What can I do to protect myself?

- **Wash your hands.** Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds. (Need a timer? Sing the "happy birthday" song twice.) If soap and water aren't available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.** This helps prevent the spread of the virus.
- **Avoid contact with people who are sick.** This might mean you need to delay a visit, or meet by phone or video chat instead.
- **Get the flu shot.** While the flu shot offers most protection if you get it early in the season, it's better now than never. If you get a flu vaccine but still get the flu, you will most likely have more mild illness and less risk of serious complications. You can get your flu shot from your healthcare provider, at many local pharmacies, or at [Public Health Department clinics](#).

Should I take Tamiflu or other antiviral medicine? What about antibiotics?

Your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medicine such as Tamiflu to help reduce symptoms of the flu, especially if you are at risk of serious complications. If your doctor prescribes antiviral medicine, be sure to take it as directed.

If you are generally healthy (except for the flu), your doctor may not prescribe this medicine. Most of the time, people who are generally healthy do not need to take antiviral medicine for the flu.

If you or someone you know is taking Tamiflu, it's important to follow all regular precautions to avoid catching or spreading the flu. Research does not consistently show that it can reduce the risk of giving the flu to others.

Antibiotics are not effective against the flu. Taking antibiotics when you don't need them can expose you to unwanted side effects and can contribute to antibiotic resistance, making the drugs less effective when we do need them.

How long is someone contagious after getting the flu?

A person may be considered no longer contagious after:

- At least seven days past the start date of their illness.
- 24 hours with no fever, and no use of fever-reducing medicine (such as Tylenol or ibuprofen)

That means if you have been sick with the flu for more than seven days and still have a fever, you can still spread the virus to others. (Some people, especially children, may spread the virus for more than seven days.) You need to meet both conditions to be no longer contagious.

People often cough for a period of time after recovering from the flu because of the damage it causes to lungs and airways. That cough does not necessarily mean the person is still contagious.

I already had the flu. Should I get the flu shot?

Yes. The flu vaccine protects against three to four strains of the flu. If you've had one strain, you are still susceptible to the other strains. Get your flu shot!

Where can I learn more?

Visit www.cdc.gov/flu.

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