

Staying healthy during holiday flu season

Each winter, [flu](#) activity tends to rise just as families begin gathering for the holidays. This year is no exception. National surveillance data shows influenza circulating in many regions of the country, with ongoing activity expected through winter.

As travel, school breaks and holiday events increase, health experts emphasize planning ahead to stay well.

Navigating flu season during the holidays

“We’re in a unique part of the year. We had Thanksgiving and we’re going into the Christmas and New Year holiday. We have schools on breaks and people traveling,” says [Doug Kasper, MD, infectious disease specialist with OSF HealthCare](#). “We notice nationwide that when there’s viral activity on the coasts, it will eventually find its way into every part of the area, which includes Central Illinois.”

Health organizations such as the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#) and [the Illinois Department of Public Health \(IDPH\)](#) are also urging families to stay alert to flu symptoms and take steps to protect themselves.

Flu vaccine helps preserve normal routines

For many families, staying healthy during the holidays means protecting not only themselves but also older adults, infants and immunocompromised relatives.

“People will start to travel and be around older and younger family members as families congregate. We want people to protect themselves but also be able to enjoy those activities without getting sick,” Dr. Kasper says. “It’s also a time where kids are bringing home infections from school. So, we want our kids to be in school and participate in activities. Anything we can offer them to help keep them in their normal routine is beneficial, which includes flu vaccines for our children.”

Flu vaccination remains the best way to reduce severe illness and disruption, which is especially important for school-aged children whose attendance affects the whole household.

When you're sick, staying at home matters

While vaccination reduces risk, the flu can still spread quickly – especially in places where people gather. That’s why knowing when to stay home remains essential.

“If you are sick, you need to stay home. Especially in our school populations, it’s hard when a child is sick. Maybe they’re borderline and you don’t know how sick they are, it’s hard to remain home,” Dr. Kasper says. “We see a lot of infections that start at the level where we congregate. Whether that’s at school or a medical facility, it will find its way into our homes. So, the way to try and address that is that if you’re sick, particularly if you have a fever, is to stay home. At least be without a fever for 24 hours before resuming normal activity.”

Public health agencies echo this guidance, advising families to keep children home from school when they have a fever, vomiting, severe cough or other flu-like symptoms.

[Flu symptoms](#) can come on suddenly and vary from person to person. Common flu symptoms include:

- Fever
- Muscle or body aches
- Extreme exhaustion or fatigue
- Headache

- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sneezing
- Sometimes a sore throat
- Vomiting or diarrhea

Fever and body aches often last for three to seven days. Cough and fatigue may last for two weeks or more.