

With flu on the rise nationally, start your new year off safely

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There are several simple ways to protect yourself from the flu, says a Purdue University associate professor of nursing. Credit: Dan Page

It might be the start of a new year, but many Americans are still battling a flu bug from last year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting an increase in influenza and influenza-like illnesses across the country. In its latest report, the CDC estimates that 6.4 million cases of flu have been diagnosed, and during the 2019-20 flu season in the United States 27 children and 2,900 adults have died due to influenza.

There are several simple steps to protect yourself and others during this [flu season](#), says Libby Richards, an associate professor of nursing who specializes in [public health](#) in Purdue University's School of Nursing.

The easiest step is to get a flu shot.

"If you haven't yet received your flu shot, you should get one now. The flu virus is circulating in all parts of the country, and being vaccinated is your best protection," Richards says. "It takes two weeks for immunity to develop after receiving a vaccination, so you aren't magically protected right

after receiving the shot. If you have flulike symptoms, please do not travel or expose others."

Another way to battle the flu is to reduce your exposure to germs. Effective strategies include proper and frequent handwashing and limiting the time spent around crowds, Richards says. You should also avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes as much as possible. If you are in a low-risk group, you can use over-the-counter medications to treat fevers, aches and coughs. Youths should avoid products that contain aspirin due to the risk of severe complications.

"Everyone with flulike symptoms should stay home from work or school and avoid contact with others until they have been fever-free without the use of medications for 24 hours," Richards says. "If you only have a cough, people of all ages should use proper cough hygiene by covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Then properly dispose of the tissue immediately and wash your hands or use hand sanitizer."

Provided by Purdue University

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