

# When and why the flu spreads so fast



## Know your body and environment

The flu not only hits hard, it spreads fast. Oftentimes, flu viruses spread by droplets distributed by coughing, sneezing or talking. These droplets can disperse up to six feet away and land in the mouths or noses of people within that radius. Less often, the flu may spread when someone touches a surface or object with the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. Understanding when and why the flu spreads can help you protect against it.

### Cold temperatures

Scientists have found that in cold temperatures, such as during the winter months, the flu virus forms a hard coating that acts like an envelope, helping the virus spread through the cold air and then melt inside our bodies.<sup>1</sup> Researchers compare this infection process to a coated chocolate candy in your mouth.<sup>1</sup> The protective covering of the flu virus melts when it enters your respiratory tract; it's only in this melted phase that the virus is capable of entering and infecting the cells in your body.<sup>1</sup>

It is hypothesized that in warm weather, the flu virus does not form the hard coating and loses its ability to spread from person to person. Thus, as the weather warms in the spring, the flu viruses weaken, and the flu season wanes.<sup>1</sup>

## Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs<sup>2</sup>

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with viruses that cause flu.
- If you have the flu, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or other necessities. Fever should be gone without the need to use a fever-reducing medicine.



Sources:

1. Ambati, SK. Role of Temperature in Influenza Outbreaks, *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, August 2020.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. How to Prevent Flu, August 31, 2022. Available at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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