

# Flu Season Safety Tips

By Trudie Mitschang

**INFLUENZA (FLU)** is a contagious viral disease that typically occurs during the fall and winter months, a period commonly referred to as flu season that often begins in October and November. Most of the time, flu activity peaks between December and February and can last as late as May. Flu symptoms include cough, fever, sore throat, headache, chills, muscle aches and fatigue. While there are several different strains of the flu virus, all are transmitted from person to person via airborne droplets (typically when an infected person coughs or sneezes). For most people, contracting the flu is unpleasant and inconvenient, resulting in time off work and school and avoidance of regular activities. But, for those with a primary immune deficiency (PI), the flu can cause severe and even life-threatening complications, which is why taking precautionary measures to avoid contracting the flu is such a high priority for those in the PI community.

## Be Safe, Not Sorry

Common-sense hygiene practices are critical to limiting the spread of the flu virus. Consider more frequent handwashing, the use of antibacterial hand sanitizers and even respiratory masks when visiting highly populated public areas such as shopping malls. Ask your primary care physician about additional ways to prevent exposure based on your specific illness and lifestyle.

Public health officials advise the most effective way to avoid an infection with influenza is to receive an annual flu vaccine. Influenza vaccines are safe, and contrary to a common misconception, they do not cause the flu. Because influenza viruses characteristically change or mutate from year to year, it is necessary to prepare a new vaccine formula for protection against the circulating flu strains of the current year. In a nutshell, that means getting a flu vaccine last year will not provide protection during this year's flu season.

The Immune Deficiency Foundation advises all family members and other household members in contact with a patient with a PI receive the 2018/2019 influenza vaccine, which provides protection against four distinct influenza virus strains. Currently, there are two types of delivery methods for seasonal flu vaccine available in the U.S.: the inactivated or "killed" flu vaccine (the flu shot) and a live attenuated influenza vaccine (nasal spray). Both are highly effective in preventing the flu in healthy individuals, but the inactivated version is advised for PI patients. Ask your doctor about your specific situation to see if this vaccine is right for you.

## You're Sick, Now What?

If you are one of the unfortunate individuals who comes down with a case of the flu this year, you have several options. It's important to note that antiviral medicines such as Tamiflu or Relenza are very effective if taken within the first 48 hours of symptom onset. Antiviral medicines have been found to shorten the duration of influenza and lessen the severity of symptoms.

"We want all our primary immunodeficiency patients to take influenza seriously," said Dr. Ann Bullinger, PharmD, who leads the U.S. medical affairs team for CSL Behring's immunoglobulin therapy area. "Check with your doctor about preventive measures, and be sure to get immediate attention if you show any signs of the flu."<sup>1</sup>

Once flu symptoms are in full swing, there is not much you can do but ride it out. In addition to getting lots of rest and drinking plenty of liquids, a number of products can help you feel a little less miserable. Look for over-the-counter treatments such as:

- Oscillococinum, a homeopathic supplement in Europe that has gained popularity in the U.S. Studies suggest it may shorten the duration of the flu and ease symptoms, but there's no proof that it prevents the flu.
- Elderberry extract has been shown to ease symptoms when taken within the first 24 to 48 hours after you start to feel ill. There aren't any known side effects if you use it for five days or less; just don't eat the plant itself as it can cause nausea.
- Over-the-counter cough and cold medicines like NyQuil and DayQuil are proven effective in relieving symptoms in adults. For high fever and body aches, both products come in an extra-strength "severe" formula. Side effects include drowsiness.

Flu season is without question everyone's least favorite time of the year. Since the flu returns annually and is considered a common virus, it's easy to not take it seriously. But, remember, when it comes to the PI patient population, the flu is nothing to sneeze at. Talk to your doctor about the best prevention options during the 2018/2019 flu season, and take necessary precautions now to keep you and your loved ones influenza-free. ■

## Reference

1. Moffitt, D. Flu Endangers People Who Have Primary Immunodeficiencies. CSL Behring press release, Feb. 13, 2018. Accessed at [www.cslbehring.com/vita/20180213-flu-and-pi](http://www.cslbehring.com/vita/20180213-flu-and-pi).

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## Chewable Immune Support

Sambucol is a black elderberry extract that claims to provide natural immune system support. Developed by a world-renowned virologist, Sambucol is comprised of the same black elderberry extract that has been used in scientific studies. One bottle contains 30 chewable, berry-flavored tablets and is safe for daily use.

\$10.75; [iherb.com](http://iherb.com)

# Shopping Guide to Flu Products



## Soothing Solution

Vicks VapoRub can temporarily relieve bronchial irritation, as well as ease aches and pains in muscles and joints. The product contains active cough suppressants that are clinically proven to relieve coughs quickly. It is used by applying topically to the chest or neck. \$4.89; [riteaid.com](http://riteaid.com)



## Daytime Relief

DayQuil is an over-the-counter medication formulated to treat daytime symptoms of the cold and flu, including cough, headache, minor aches and pains, fever and sore throat, without causing drowsiness.

\$9.99; [vicks.com](http://vicks.com)

## Symptom Relief Minus Side Effects

If taken at the first sign of flu-like symptoms, Oscilloccinum claims to reduce the duration and severity of body aches, headache, fever, chills and fatigue. The sweet-tasting pellets dissolve under the tongue and do not cause drowsiness. They are recommended for everyone ages 2 years and older.

\$24.99; [puritanspride.com](http://puritanspride.com)



## Concentrated Caplets

Theraflu ExpressMax Severe Cold & Flu caplets combine four active ingredients to deliver “7-symptom relief.” In addition, a specially formulated coating provides a unique warming sensation. The product can help reduce aches, pains and congestion, while also reducing fever.

\$6.49; [target.com](http://target.com)

