

## Protecting Yourself and Your Family from the Flu this Winter

By: Karolina Stack, MD

Flu activity is climbing nationwide and early surges among children and young adults are mirroring trends now overwhelming the U.K. The U.S. saw a 7% rise in flu activity in one week, with nearly 2 million illnesses, 19,000 hospitalizations and 730 deaths so far this season. In [Wisconsin](#), flu activity is low but increasing.

The U.K. 's early, severe spike fueled by the new H3N2 "subclade K" variant has experts warning of one of the toughest flu seasons in decades. With flu typically peaking in the US shortly after the holidays, now is the narrow window to build full immunity, especially prior to and amidst holiday gatherings. Taking preventive measures helps protect individuals and communities from widespread illness.

- **Prevent the Spread of Flu:**

- Doctors recommend everyone 6 months and older receive a flu vaccine annually, especially people at higher risk.
  - If you have a rare complication to certain immunizations or if you are pregnant, speak with your primary care physician or OB-GYN to determine if the flu vaccine is appropriate for you.
- The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important way to reduce your risk of catching the flu.
- Be mindful of touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; this is how germs spread.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.
  - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after touching doorknobs or other high-touch surfaces, or soiled tissues.
- If you are sick, stay home to avoid spreading the virus to others. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

- **Managing Flu Symptoms:**

- For mild, new symptoms: Visit a primary care doctor or pediatrician. Many Ascension Wisconsin primary care clinics offer same-day sick visits.
- Urgent care: Recommended only when there is urgency, including symptoms that need prompt attention outside of regular office hours, such as a high fever or mild-to-moderate symptoms that develop suddenly and cannot wait for a primary care appointment.
- Hospital ER: Severe symptoms in all ages or new symptoms of any severity in infants under 3 months.

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care through 16 hospitals, 12 of which are wholly owned, and four that are jointly operated, and more than 100 related healthcare sites, with more than three million patient visits each year. To schedule an appointment with a primary care provider or learn more about Ascension Wisconsin, please visit [healthcare.ascension.org](http://healthcare.ascension.org).

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