

Reader's Digest

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10 Signs Your Flu Might Be Deadly

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 80,000 people died from the flu last year alone. Here's what you need to know to stay safe this season.

What about the stomach flu?



Also known as gastroenteritis flu, this can also be caused by a virus—most commonly rotavirus and norovirus, says [Niket Sonpal, MD](#), an NYC-based internist and gastroenterologist. “With gastroenteritis, the main symptoms someone will have include watery diarrhea and vomiting,” Dr. Sonpal says. “You might also have stomach pain, cramping, fever, nausea, and a headache.” Find out [8 ways to prevent getting the stomach flu](#).

Difficulty breathing



Having a hard time breathing normally—or feeling unusually short of breath—are signs that you’re experiencing flu complications, says Dr. Sonpal. This is more than a stuffy nose that makes it hard to breathe. An infection like pneumonia makes it a struggle for you to fill your lungs; you’ll be unable to take long deep breaths. Here are some [signs your respiratory infection is actually pneumonia](#).

Chest or abdominal pain



If you experience chest pain, says Dr. Sonpal, you should consider a trip to the ER to rule out heart trouble. This could be a sign of infection such as myocarditis (inflammation of the heart) or pericarditis (inflammation of the sac around the heart). If you suffer from a preexisting heart issue like congestive heart failure, an infection resulting from the flu could make conditions worse.

Severe or persistent vomiting



While Dr. Sonpal says that one of the symptoms that come with gastroenteritis is vomiting, this should only last a day or two. If it's been more than two days, you're vomiting blood, you have a high fever above 104 degrees Fahrenheit, or you can't keep liquids down for longer than a day, you should call your doctor.

You're a certain age or size



Senior citizens (over the age of 65) and people who are overweight or obese are more likely to get the flu, warns Dr. Sonpal. These groups tend to have weaker immune systems and a lower immune response to viruses, and can therefore be at risk for complications. The CDC stresses that the elderly especially watch for secondary infections. “This is because the immune system typically weakens with age,” Dr. Sonpal says. Here’s are [some ways to tell that flu season is in full effect.](#)

You have a medical condition



“Being pregnant or having a chronic lung disease such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchiectasis, and cystic fibrosis are among the diseases that place someone at high risk for developing flu complications,” says Dr. Sonpal.

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