

## Flu Season: When is it an emergency?

Brighton Volunteer Ambulance

Flu Season is just ahead, and Brighton Volunteer Ambulance has some tips on what to do if your flu turns into an emergency situation.

### Flu Symptoms

Flu symptoms can include high fever, headache, body aches, extreme fatigue, sore throat, chills, cough, and stuffy or runny nose. Your healthcare provider may prescribe anti-viral medications, which work best within 48 hours of the earliest signs of the flu. The flu is unpleasant for everyone, but some people are at greater risk for serious flu-related complications, including young children, the elderly, pregnant women and people with certain long-term medical conditions (listed below).

Statistically, more people may experience influenza-like illness, or ILI, than are actually diagnosed with the flu. With ILI, patients experience flu symptoms, yet are not infected with the influenza virus. Treatment is often the same as for the flu: drinking fluids, taking over-the-counter pain relievers and getting plenty of rest.

### Should I go to the emergency room or call 911 if I have the flu?

Unless you are very ill, the ER should not be the first place to go for flu care. Call your doctor at the earliest signs of flu, and you may be prescribed medications such as Tamiflu to help alleviate the symptoms.

To avoid the risk of spreading the flu, or consuming critical care resources when you don't need to, call your primary care provider and see if you can rest and recover at home. Get lots of rest, use over-the-counter pain relievers for fever and aches, drink plenty of fluids, and follow your doctor's advice.

However, if you get the flu and experience any of the emergency warning signs below, if you are very sick, or if you have a condition with a high risk of flu complications, don't hesitate to call your doctor or healthcare provider, and consider emergency treatment.

### How do I know it's an emergency?

If you or a family member have the flu and experience the signs below, contact your health provider immediately.

#### Emergency warning signs in children:

- Fast breathing or difficulty breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking fluids

- Not waking or interacting
- Being so irritable that the child doesn't want to be held
- Fever with a rash
- Symptoms that improve but then come back with a fever and worse cough

**For an infant, get emergency help immediately if:**

- They are unable to eat
- Have trouble breathing
- No tears when crying

**Emergency warning signs for adults:**

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Pressure or pain in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe vomiting
- Symptoms that improve but come back with fever and worse cough

**Health- and Age-Related Risks**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) list the following conditions as known to increase a person's risk of complications from the flu:

- Asthma
- Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions
- Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
- Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes)
- Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
- Kidney disorders
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- Morbid obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- People younger than 19 years of age on long-term aspirin therapy
- Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids)

Other people at high risk from the flu:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Newborns and children up to 5 years old (especially children younger than 2 years old)
- People with chronic conditions
- Pregnant women and women up to 2 weeks after the end of pregnancy

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/takingcare.htm> or talk with your healthcare provider.

This information comes from Brighton Volunteer Ambulance, 1551 Winton Road South, Rochester, N.Y. 14618, (585) 271-2718, [www.brightonambulance.org](http://www.brightonambulance.org) or follow us on Facebook.

Brighton Volunteer Ambulance (BVA), a nonprofit independent volunteer ambulance service, provides advanced and basic life support emergency medical services to Brighton residents. BVA also provides community education in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), the use of automatic external defibrillators (AED) and other EMS related services. To learn more, visit [www.brightonambulance.org](http://www.brightonambulance.org)