

After being sick with pandemic influenza, When to Return to your Workplace or to School



This information is provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for veterans, their families, friends, volunteers, employees and trainees. Use it as a guide if you have been told you have pandemic flu by a health care provider. Use it if you believe you have pandemic flu based on symptoms of illness. This guide can help you to decide when to return to the workplace or to school. Use this only during a flu pandemic.

This guidance can help you to decide when to return to the workplace or to school. It applies only when:

- ← A flu pandemic is taking place
- ← If your local health department or community guidance does not state otherwise

Use it as a guide if you:

- ← Have been told you have pandemic flu by a health care provider
- ← Believe you have pandemic flu based on symptoms of illness

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

- ← Your healthcare provider
- ← Your local VA
- ← Local and national news
- ← On these Web sites

www.publichealth.va.gov/Flu/pandemicflu.htm
www.pandemicflu.gov



Infection: Don't Pass It On Team

U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Central Office (13)
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420
pandemicflu@va.gov
vaww.vhaco.va.gov/phshcg/Flu/pandemicflu.htm
(VA staff only)
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After returning to your workplace or school, remember:

- ← You may be coughing for weeks but not be contagious. It is always good to cover your coughs or sneezes with tissues, and throw them in the trash. Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing as soon as you can.
- ← Keep your hands clean by washing with soap and water or by using alcohol-based hand gels. When you can, avoid touching people and surfaces with unwashed hands.
- ← Return home or stay home and contact your health care provider if:
 - Fever re-occurs
 - Cough worsens
 - Breathing is not normal
 - You have other symptoms that worry you



If you have pandemic flu, before returning to your workplace or school:

HOW FLU IS SPREAD

Pandemic flu is an illness that is easy to spread to others at home, in the community, at work, or at school. The pandemic flu viruses are spread from person to person when people with flu cough or sneeze. People may get flu by touching something with flu virus on it and then touching their mouth, eyes, or nose. Once you have had pandemic flu, you are not likely get sick from that same virus.

SYMPTOMS OF FLU

- Sudden onset of fever (100.4°F [38°C] or higher)
- Sudden onset of cough, sore throat, and/or problems breathing

These often occur with chills, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and runny or stuffy nose.

Pandemic flu illness will likely make many people, even young adults feel very sick - sick enough to stay in bed. Contact your health care provider if you:

- Are not sure if you have pandemic flu
- Want information about medicines that may help you get better faster
- Want to know how to avoid spreading the flu virus to others



Employers may offer special sick leave options in a pandemic. Let your work know if you are:

- Sick with pandemic flu
- Home caring for someone who is sick

STAY HOME AND AWAY FROM OTHERS, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE UNTIL

- ← At least 7 days after your symptoms first appeared AND
- ← At least 48 hours after your fever has ended without your taking fever-reducing medicines such as acetaminophen (Tylenol™), and ibuprofen (Motrin™, Advil™).



WHY? Studies show you are most contagious and likely to spread flu virus to others for at least 7 days after your first symptoms appeared and for up to 48 hours after your fever has ended.

IF YOU ARE IMMUNOSUPPRESSED, CONSULT WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ABOUT WHEN :

- ← You may return to your workplace or school
- ← If you should receive antiviral medicines

WHY? Being immunosuppressed means your body's immune system may be weaker than normal. For example, these can weaken your body's immune system:

- Cancer or cancer treatment
- Organ or bone marrow transplants
- HIV/AIDS
- Taking drugs such as steroids

Studies show that an immunosuppressed person who has flu may be able to spread flu virus for a longer time than a person who is not immunosuppressed.

IF YOU ARE TAKING ANTIVIRAL DRUGS FOR FLU, talk with your health care provider as to when to return to your workplace or school.

WHY? Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®) are antivirals used to treat flu. They may shorten the time when you are contagious (able to spread flu to others). This may allow you to return to work or to school sooner. Without antivirals, most should stay away from others, work or school for 7 days after first symptoms appear.

Note:

Even if you are taking antivirals, you should not return to work or to school for at least 48 hours after your last fever.