

Flu season is upon us, occurring in the fall and winter. Generally, there are increased cases of the flu between the months of December – February. However, you can get the flu at any time of the year. There are several other respiratory viruses that also spread during flu season, with similar symptoms to the flu. These viruses include the common cold, RSV, COVID-19, and parainfluenza. The overall impact that influenza has on public health varies with each flu season. Influenza is associated with higher mortality rates in transplant recipients due to their lowered immune system. Research shows a lower rate of vaccination for the flu among transplant recipients when compared to the rest of the population.

## Symptoms of influenza

As stated above, symptoms of the flu are very similar to symptoms of other respiratory infections. Symptoms of the flu usually show up quickly, whereas colds tend to have a slower progression. Common symptoms of the flu include the following:

Fever	Cough
Headache	Muscle aches
Fatigue	Sweating and chills
Runny or stuffy nose	Sore throat

Influenza infections can lead to serious complications for transplant recipients including more severe symptoms, other infections, hospitalizations, or even organ rejection. Early intervention is the best way to manage an influenza infection and symptoms. It is important to keep your transplant team up-to-date on any of the above symptoms or changes to your health.

## What can I do to lower my risk?

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. Stay home when you are sick.
3. When coughing or sneezing, cover your nose and mouth.
4. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water. If that's not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
5. Avoid touching your face—eyes, nose, or mouth.
6. Practice good personal hygiene.
7. Routinely clean objects and surfaces that are touched frequently like doorknobs, phones, remotes, and keyboards.

## How does the flu spread?

Influenza is caused by a virus that spreads as droplets when someone who is infected coughs, sneezes, or speaks. You can become infected either by breathing in the droplets directly or touching an object with the droplets on them before touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

If you have the flu, you are the most contagious during the first three days of your illness. Most people with the flu can start spreading the virus a day before their own symptoms appear. You remain contagious up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. Individuals with a low immune system can be contagious for longer periods of time.

## Vaccines

The CDC recommends that everyone get an annual vaccination against the flu. Flu vaccines are generally safe and recommended for people who have received an organ transplant. Transplant recipients or those scheduled for transplant within two weeks should not get the live attenuated vaccine.

According to the American Society of Transplantation, transplant candidates and recipients should speak with their transplant center to determine the appropriate vaccination for them. It is possible that the flu vaccine may not work as well in transplant recipients due to anti-rejection medications.



# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

*This section of our monthly newsletter will focus on support and resources offered both by the Organ Transplant Center and throughout the nation. Please utilize these as you need them and reach out with any questions.*

**Kidney and Pancreas Line: 319-356-1136**

**Liver Line: 319-356-1137**

**Heart Line: 319-356-1028**

**Lung Line: 319-356-2016**

## Medicare and Transplant

Medicare eligibility is based on age, disability, having end-stage kidney failure, or receiving a kidney transplant. No other organ transplant or need for organ transplant qualifies one for Medicare. There is a 1-year enrollment window for Medicare from date of kidney transplant. Delaying enrollment can increase chances of higher out-of-pocket expenses for anti-rejection medication. Medicare Advantage plans cover anti-rejection medications, and out-of-pocket expenses are subject to plan.

\* For further questions or coverage changes, please contact the Organ Transplant Center Financial Counselors.

## Video Resources

The Organ Transplant Center has put together videos to better explain the transplant evaluation process and provide additional patient education. Please click the links below to access these videos.

- [Kidney Transplant – Patient Education Videos](#)
- [Liver Transplant – Patient Education Videos](#)
- [Pancreas Transplant – Patient Education Videos](#)

## Organ Transplant Support Group

Starting in February 2024, the UI Health Care Organ Transplant Center will begin having our support group every other month. The support group will also be a hybrid version—both in-person and by Zoom. Each group will be focused on a specific topic, with speakers followed by time for discussion. If you have any questions, please contact 319-467-8385.

**Location:**

Iowa Donor Network  
550 Madison Avenue  
North Liberty, IA 52317

**Date:**

December 12, 2024

**Speaker:** UI Health Care  
infectious disease  
physician

**Zoom Information:**

Meeting ID: 918 3643 6211  
Passcode: 642098

## Additional Resources

Social Security Disability

- [Adult Disability Starter Kit](#)
- [SSI Child Disability Starter Kit](#)

National Living Donor Assistance Center (NLDAC): [How to Apply](#)

Iowa Anatomical Gift Fund: [Application](#)

Iowa Donor Network / Writing Your Donor Family:  
<https://www.iowadonornetwork.org/transplant-recipients/writing-your-donor-family>

University of Iowa Telepsychology Training Clinic offers free, short-term counseling to Iowans with limited access to mental health care.

- [Click here](#) to see if you qualify

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