



Surviving sniffle season

It would be nice if the only things you'd catch in winter would be snowflakes on your tongue.

Unfortunately, many of us will catch colds and the flu.

These illnesses can knock you down for days. And the flu can be life-threatening.

The good news is that you can take steps to protect yourself.

Stop it before it starts. The best way to prevent the flu is to get a dose of flu vaccine. Flu strains vary from year to year, so you need to get the vaccine annually. Generally, it's best to do this in October or November. The vaccine is available by shot or by nasal spray. The spray is approved for use in most

healthy people ages 2 to 49.

Vaccines don't completely eliminate the threat of flu. They are valuable, though—especially for people at high risk of flu complications, such as older adults and people with long-term health problems.

There are no vaccines for colds, but you can take steps to lower your risk of catching or spreading a cold. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) and other health experts offer these suggestions:

- Wash your hands often. Use a separate hand towel if you're sick.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, mouth, and nose—areas where germs can easily

enter your body. ➤ Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.

When prevention fails. If you do get sick, prescription medication may reduce the severity of the flu if started soon after symptoms begin, but colds generally have to run their course. You can treat your symptoms by: ➤ Resting ➤ Drinking plenty of fluids ➤ Using over-the-counter medications, such as decongestants, with your doctor's OK. Check with a doctor before giving any medicine to children.



Find flu shot clinics at
www.health.state.nm.us/flu.