

Live Well, Work Well

Quarterly
Newsletter



What to Know About the 2025-26 Flu Season

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What to Know About the 2025-26 Flu Season

In the United States, the influenza (flu) season lasts from October through May, with peak flu activity between December and March. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 47 million to 82 million flu illnesses occurred during the 2024-25 season. Data suggested that flu activity was at its highest level in more than 15 years.

What's more, flu season in the Southern Hemisphere often indicates what's to come in the United States. Data revealed higher hospitalizations during the 2025 flu season in the Southern Hemisphere. With the potential for this year's flu season to be severe in the United States, vaccination remains the most effective way to prevent the flu, especially severe disease and hospitalization.

How to Stay Healthy

The flu can cause serious complications for people of any age, but children and older adults are especially vulnerable. Consider these tips to help keep your household healthy this flu season:

- **Get the flu vaccine.** It's the best way to protect yourself from the flu. The CDC recommends that everyone six months and older get vaccinated each year.
- **Keep your distance.** Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and stay home when you're feeling unwell. Since flu, cold and COVID-19 symptoms can overlap, getting tested can help you know what you're dealing with.

- **Wash your hands often.** Use soap and warm water to remove germs. If that's not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Use a tissue or your elbow, and throw tissues away right after using them.
- **Get enough sleep.** Aim for seven to nine hours of quality rest each night to help your immune system stay strong.
- **Stay active.** Regular exercise can boost your overall health and help your body fight off infections.
- **Eat well and stay hydrated.** A balanced diet with whole grains, lean proteins, fruits, vegetables, and fiber supports your immune system, and drinking enough water keeps your body functioning at its best.

Experts recommend getting vaccinated against the flu by the end of October, so don't delay getting your shot. Contact your doctor today to learn more about vaccines.

New Blood Pressure Guidance Emphasizes Prevention

High blood pressure affects nearly half (46.7%) of all adults in the United States and is the leading cause of death in the country. For the first time since 2017, there are new [guidelines](#) from the American Heart Association (AHA) to prevent and manage high blood pressure, including earlier intervention with medication.

It's important to note that the blood pressure criteria remain the same as the previous 2017 AHA guideline:

- Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg;
- Elevated blood pressure is 120-129 mm Hg and <80 mm Hg;
- Stage 1 hypertension (high blood pressure) is 130-139 mm Hg or 80-89 mm Hg; and
- Stage 2 hypertension (high blood pressure) is ≥ 140 mm Hg or ≥ 90 mm Hg.

However, under the new guidelines, the AHA and the American College of Cardiology advise earlier treatment that includes lifestyle modification and medications as appropriate. Consider these recommended lifestyle changes to prevent or manage high blood pressure:

- **Cut back on sodium.** Aim for less than 2,300 milligrams per day, and ideally closer to 1,500. Check food labels, skip the salt at the table and limit packaged or restaurant foods.
- **Limit or avoid alcohol.** If you choose to drink, stick to no more than two drinks a day for men and one for women.

- **Manage stress.** Regular exercise helps, and so do techniques like meditation, deep breathing or yoga.
- **Reach a healthy weight.** Even a 5% weight loss can make a big difference if you're overweight or obese.
- **Eat for your heart.** Try the DASH eating plan, which focuses on low sodium and plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds and lean proteins.
- **Move more.** Aim for 75 to 150 minutes of physical activity each week, including cardio and strength training.
- **Check your blood pressure at home.** It can help confirm your doctor's diagnosis and guide your care plan over time.

The AHA also now recognizes that specific medications, including newer ones such as glucagon-like peptide-1 (or GLP-1) medications, may be helpful for overweight or obese patients with high blood pressure.

The new guideline reflects several significant changes since 2017, including the use of the AHA's [PREVENT risk calculator](#) to estimate the risk of cardiovascular disease for people age 30 to 79. Developed in 2023, it's the first risk calculator that combines cardiovascular, kidney and metabolic health measures to estimate cardiovascular disease risk.

Talk to your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your blood pressure.

The Mediterranean Diet May Lower the Risk for Dementia

A new study published in *Nature* revealed that closely following the Mediterranean diet can significantly reduce the risk of dementia by up to 35% in individuals with the highest genetic predisposition to Alzheimer's disease.

Researchers tracked over 5,700 participants for more than three decades. They found that people with two copies of the APOE4 gene—known to increase Alzheimer's risk twelvefold—benefited most from the diet. The Mediterranean diet, rich in vegetables, fruits, nuts, whole grains, legumes, fish and olive oil, and low in red and processed meats, appeared to positively influence metabolic pathways linked to brain health. Lead researcher Yuxi Liu emphasized that the diet's impact on nutrient digestion and energy production may help explain the dramatic reduction in dementia risk. Notably, higher adherence to the diet correlated with even greater protection.

Even if you're not genetically at risk, everyday choices can help protect your cognitive health. Lifestyle interventions, such as the following, can play a powerful role in brain health:

- **Follow a Mediterranean diet.** Focus on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fish and olive oil. Try to limit processed foods and reduce your consumption of red meat, sugary snacks and refined grains.
- **Move often.** Aim for regular physical activity, including walking and strength training.
- **Sleep well.** Poor sleep is linked to increased dementia risk, so get seven to nine hours of quality sleep each night.
- **Manage stress.** Practice mindfulness, stay socially connected and take breaks. Isolation can negatively impact brain health.
- **Stay sharp.** Read, play games and keep learning new things. Puzzles, strategy games and memory exercises can stimulate cognitive function.

Reach out to a health care professional if you have any questions or concerns about Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.



October: National Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Breast cancer is the second most common type of cancer among American women, behind skin cancer. The American Cancer Society estimates that 1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer during their lives. This disease can also affect men, although it's considered rare.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. It's important to understand the disease and conduct monthly breast exams to check for symptoms like changes in breast size or shape, breast pain and breast lumps. While the median age at the time of breast cancer diagnosis is 62, new research revealed that the rate of breast cancer among women ages 40 to 49 is increasing. As such, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that women start getting regular mammograms at age 40.

Visit breastcancer.org to learn more about breast cancer.

November: American Diabetes Month

Over 38 million U.S. adults are impacted by some form of diabetes, according to the CDC. The most common forms of diabetes are Type 1 and Type 2. While Type 2 represents most diabetes cases, both can be deadly because they affect the body's insulin production. Type 1 diabetes is most significantly impacted by family and age, whereas Type 2 diabetes is most directly impacted by being overweight, not exercising and having a family history of diabetes.

November is National Diabetes Month, a great time to commit to a healthy lifestyle to reduce

your risk of Type 2 diabetes. Getting diagnosed early can help you manage the disease and avoid risky complications. The American Diabetes Association recommends blood glucose screening every three years for people age 35 and older.

Visit diabetes.org to learn more about diabetes and healthy lifestyle changes.

December: Safe Toys and Gifts Awareness Month

As the holidays approach, it's time to gather with loved ones to share food and gifts. Sometimes, well-intentioned gifts to children can come with unforeseeable risks. It's important to be aware of toys that may harm recipients.

December is Safe Toys and Gifts Awareness Month, so take extra time to consider a gift's safety before giving it. Tips for selecting appropriate toys include checking labels for age ranges, avoiding toys with small parts that can injure, be swallowed or cause blindness, and ensuring toys are labeled as nontoxic.

If you're gifting sports equipment or similar gear, it's important to provide protective gear (e.g., helmets and knee pads). Also check for safety recalls and warnings at recalls.gov.

Looking Ahead

January: National Blood Donor Month

February: American Heart Month

March: National Nutrition Month

Maintaining Healthy Cortisol Levels

Cortisol is a hormone produced by the adrenal glands, located on the kidneys. This hormone typically aids in regulating a person's metabolism, blood sugar, blood pressure and stress response. Cortisol levels usually go up in the morning and slowly go back down throughout the day.

While it's normal for cortisol to fluctuate throughout the day, consistently high or low levels can cause health issues. Understanding your cortisol levels can be essential for managing stress and improving your quality of life. Here are some ways that may help you maintain healthy cortisol levels:

- **Prioritize sleep.** Adhere to a consistent sleep schedule each day. Creating a relaxing night-time routine can help your brain and body wind down at night.
- **Exercise regularly.** Try to work out 150 to 200 minutes each week. This can be walking, running, biking or playing a sport.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Learn to recognize when you are having stressful thoughts. When you are feeling stressed, take a moment to practice a breathing exercise or mindfulness exercise (e.g., meditating) to manage your stress.
- **Find joy.** Make time for activities you enjoy, such as reading, listening to music, dancing, crafting or baking. Having fun and laughing can reduce stress and cortisol.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** The following foods may help manage cortisol levels:
 - » Dark chocolate
 - » Whole grains
 - » Fruits and vegetables
 - » Green tea
 - » Salmon and other fish
 - » Fermented foods
- **See your primary care provider.** Health care providers may prescribe treatments for high or low cortisol levels based on the severity of the imbalance. For high cortisol, a doctor may prescribe medications that inhibit cortisol production, such as ketoconazole or metyrapone, or may recommend surgery to remove adrenal or pituitary tumors if present. For low cortisol, a doctor may prescribe hydrocortisone or prednisone to restore normal hormone levels.

Seek the advice of a medical professional for a better understanding of your cortisol levels. They may be able to administer a cortisol test to measure the cortisol in your blood, urine or saliva. Standard blood panels generally don't test cortisol levels. A physician usually orders cortisol testing separately to learn more about your health conditions. Your health care provider might order additional testing to pinpoint the cause of your abnormal cortisol levels. They may also prescribe steroid medications to adjust your cortisol level.

Contact a health care professional if you are concerned about your cortisol levels or to learn more.



Understanding Fibermaxxing

Fiber is having its moment on social media. With a growing awareness of gut health, a new trend called “fibermaxxing” is encouraging people to load up on fiber-rich foods like oats, beans, berries and chia seeds. Fibermaxxing is the practice of intentionally increasing your daily fiber intake, often to meet or exceed the recommended amount. The goal? Better digestion, improved heart health, lower cholesterol and reduced cancer risk.

While it may sound like just another fleeting wellness trend, experts say this one has real merit. Most Americans, over 90% of women and 97% of men, don’t get enough fiber daily. That’s problematic, especially as low fiber intake has been linked to rising rates of colon cancer among younger adults. Experts say fibermaxxing can offer a wide range of benefits, including the following:

- Improved digestion and regularity
- Lower cholesterol and blood sugar levels
- Reduced risk of colon cancer, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes
- Support for gut microbiome, which may influence mood and immunity
- Weight management, thanks to fiber’s ability to keep you full longer

How to Fibermaxx Safely

While fibermaxxing can be beneficial, going too hard too fast can backfire. Sudden increases in fiber may cause bloating, gas or discomfort—especially if your gut isn’t used to it. Here are some tips to incorporate it correctly:

- **Start slow.** Begin with 5 grams/day and increase by 5 grams weekly.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Fiber needs water to move through your system.
- **Eat whole foods, including beans, fruits, veggies, whole grains, nuts and seeds.** Some easy fiber-rich foods to try include chia seeds, raspberries, black beans, oats, popcorn, quinoa, barley, carrots, apples and peas.
- **Avoid relying on supplements.** Whole foods offer more nutrients and variety.
- **Listen to your body.** If symptoms persist, adjust your intake or consult a dietitian.

Fibermaxxing isn’t just a trend. Most of us need more fiber and doing it right can lead to lasting health benefits. Talk to a health care professional about diet changes or concerns.

Prioritizing Wellness During the 2025-26 School Year

Many parents and kids may be excited for school to start after a long summer. However, the new school year may come with new or recurring challenges. Working parents with school-age children often need to establish new routines, manage an influx of activities, prepare healthy meals and snacks, and help ease any back-to-school anxiety.

The return to school and its associated responsibilities can impact everyone differently. Therefore, prioritizing wellness with a proactive approach is essential to cope with the changes and obstacles a new school year may bring.

Checking In With Children

Kids often experience stress and uncertainty at the start of a new school year due to new classmates, classrooms and even school buildings. Monitor your children for signs of anxiety or distress. Be on the lookout for changes in behavior and mood or physical symptoms, such as increased defiance or irritability; disturbances in sleep; loss of appetite; lack of concentration; less energy; sadness or crying; nausea, muscle tension or dizziness; and refusal to go to school.

If a child or others in the home shows any of these signs, they may have anxiety about their schooling situation. Children are resilient, but it's still important to pay attention to signs of anxiety and seek professional support if any warning signs persist.

Taking Care of Yourself

With school back in session, here are some healthy ways for working parents and caregivers to make the school year more manageable and balance their work and personal responsibilities:

- **Set reasonable expectations.** Establish realistic expectations about what you think you can accomplish each day or week. Don't be hard on yourself; cut yourself some slack and focus on completing high-impact tasks and responsibilities.
- **Develop a schedule.** It is essential to create a routine that works around your work schedule and your family's needs. Additionally, consider consolidating certain activities, such as housework, chores or extracurricular activities, to one or two specific days to help everyone stay focused.
- **Set boundaries.** If you feel spread thin between being a good caregiver and an efficient employee, it may be helpful to set some boundaries. Remember that you're in control of how you're expending your energy; you can free up mental space to allow yourself to be more present where and when it matters.

- **Create healthy habits.** Be sure to get plenty of sleep and eat well so you can be fully charged to take on the day. It's also important to stay active and incorporate movement into your daily routine. It may help to plan a workout first thing in the morning, during lunch or in the late afternoon so it fits around school schedules.
- **Make good use of weekends.** If school and work both happen on weekdays, be sure to use the weekends to recharge, reduce stress and have fun as a family. If you prefer alone time, make that a priority. Everyone needs a break from responsibilities, whether that's work or school.
- **Ask for help.** Lean on your networks for support if you need help getting through workdays. With many extracurriculars and school programs back in action, don't wait to ask others for help if you're overwhelmed. Be honest and communicative with your family and coworkers if the current situation isn't working well.

If you're feeling stressed or experiencing burnout related to kids returning to school, talk to your manager about your situation and learn more about employer-offered resources. Additionally, talk to your doctor or a licensed mental health professional if you're concerned about your or your child's mental health.



Try out these two healthy recipes from the USDA's MyPlate Kitchen website.

Cranberry Pumpkin Muffins

Makes: 12 servings

Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- ¾ cup sugar
- 3 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- ¾ tsp. allspice
- ⅓ cup vegetable oil
- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup canned pumpkin
- 2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries (chopped)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 F.
2. Sift together the dry ingredients (flour through allspice) and set aside.
3. Beat the oil, eggs and pumpkin together until well blended.
4. Add the wet ingredients (pumpkin mixture) to the dry ingredients all at once. Stir until moistened.
5. Fold in the chopped cranberries.
6. Spoon into paper-lined muffin cups.
7. Bake for 15 to 30 minutes.

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Calories	203
Total fat	7 g
Saturated fat	1 g
Cholesterol	31 mg
Sodium	255 mg
Carbohydrate	32 g
Dietary fiber	2 g
Total sugars	14 g
Added sugars included	12 g
Protein	3 g
Vitamin D	0 mcg
Calcium	83 mg
Iron	2 mg
Potassium	82 mg

Turkey Tostados

Makes: **4 servings**

Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked turkey (cut into bite-sized pieces) or 2 cups ground turkey (browned in a skillet and drained)
- 2 Tbsp. taco seasoning
- 1½ cups water
- 4 corn tortillas
- ¼ cup low-fat or fat-free refried beans
- ¼ cup low-fat shredded cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
- ½ cup tomatoes (chopped)
- ½ cup lettuce (shredded)
- 2 Tbsp. onion (chopped)
- 8 Tbsp. taco sauce
- Plain low-fat or fat-free yogurt (optional)
- Guacamole or mashed avocado (optional)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 F.
2. Wash and prepare the vegetables.
3. In a large skillet over medium heat, combine the turkey, taco seasoning and water.
4. Bring mixture to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. Place tortillas on a baking sheet. Bake for 4 to 7 minutes or until tortillas are crispy.
6. Spread tortillas with a tablespoon of beans. Top with ¼ of the meat mixture and cheese.
7. Return tortillas to oven to cook for 2 to 3 minutes or until cheese is melted.
8. Top with tomatoes, lettuce, onions and taco sauce. Garnish with yogurt and guacamole, if desired.

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Calories	197
Total fat	3 g
Saturated fat	1 g
Cholesterol	53 mg
Sodium	699 mg
Carbohydrate	19 g
Dietary fiber	3 g
Total sugars	3 g
Added sugars included	0 g
Protein	24 g
Vitamin D	0 mcg
Calcium	69 mg
Iron	1 mg
Potassium	434 mg