

HEALTH FAX: Influenza (Flu)

hfflu4/08

The flu is a respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses.

Symptoms: sudden onset of fever (usually high), headache, body aches, tiredness (can be extreme), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose.

Length of illness: Flu symptoms usually last 2-7 days.

Transmission: highly contagious; the airborne virus enters the body through mucous membranes in the mouth, nose or eyes.

Self care tips to support your body in the healing process and keep you more comfortable:

- **Drink** liquids to replace fluids lost from fever, respiratory secretions, or vomiting. Drink at least one glass of water, juice, soup, or tea each hour while awake.
- **Gargle with warm salt water.** Use approximately 1/4 tsp. salt in a glass of warm water. Lozenges and cough syrup can also calm your cough or soothe a sore throat.
- **Get enough rest** so the body can devote as much energy as possible to healing.
- **Good nutrition** helps your body recover from infection. Nausea may temporarily limit food intake to clear liquids, such as clear soups, flat ginger ale, 7-up, Gatorade, Jell-O, or water.
- **Inhale moist air**, take steamy showers or use a vaporizer. This helps relieve congestion by loosening secretions.
- **Over-the-counter (OTC) medications** can provide symptom relief:

Decongestants (Sudafed) relieve congestion without causing drowsiness.

Cough medicines (Robitussin DM, Mucinex DM) can diminish a cough.

Pain reliever/fever reducer (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) taken every 4-6 hours can control your fever and make you more comfortable.

Do NOT take aspirin. The use of aspirin in young people has been linked to Reye's Syndrome.

Ask the pharmacist to help you select the best medicine for your symptoms.

What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

The flu and the common cold are both viral respiratory illnesses. Flu symptoms (fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough) are more intense. Cold symptoms are usually milder and more likely to include a runny or stuffy nose. **Flu complications:** pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as asthma or diabetes.

Prevention:

- **WASH YOUR HANDS often** with warm water and soap or use alcohol-based sanitizers.
- **Drink more water.** Remember: alcohol dehydrates.
- **Eat more fruits and veggies!** Colorful fruits and vegetables provide vitamins and antioxidants.
- **Snooze or lose.** Most people need 6 to 9 hours of sleep every night to function well.
- **Keep it to yourself!** Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your shoulder. Throw out the tissue. Don't share drinks.
- **Don't touch that..** Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to keep germs out of your body **Exercise** for 20-30 minutes most days.
- **Relax and play.** Stress increases susceptibility to illness.
- **Kick butts!** Smoking interferes with mechanisms that keep germs out of the lungs.