

To Our Health...

Information for Improving Our Health / Prepared by Jill Peterson, RN, BSN, Nurse Consultant

Influenza (flu) vs. The common cold

Influenza is a viral infection that causes fever, runny nose, cough, headache, a feeling of illness and inflammation of the lining of the nose and airways.

Symptoms start suddenly with chills or a chilly sensation. A fever is common the first few days, and the temperature may rise to 102 to 103 degrees. People complain of body aches, especially the back and legs. Headache is often severe with aching around and behind the eyes. The throat may feel scratchy with burning in the chest and a dry cough may develop. Later the cough may become severe and productive. The person feels very fatigued.

After 2-3 days the symptoms usually start to subside, although the fever sometimes lasts up to 5 days. Coughing may persist for 10 days or longer and may take 6-8 weeks to completely resolve.

Weakness and fatigue may persist for several days or occasionally weeks.

What to do?

Call your physician at the first sign of symptoms. There are anti-flu drugs (Flumadine, Symmetrel) that can help you get better quicker but they must be taken within the first 48 hours of the symptoms onset.

The main treatment is to stay in bed, get plenty of rest, drink plenty of fluids and avoid exertion from the onset of symptoms until the fever has subsided for 24-48 hours.

Aspirin, acetaminophen and ibuprofen may help the symptoms of fever and achiness. Because of the danger of Reye's syndrome, don't give aspirin to persons under the age of 20 years.

The influenza virus can lead to pneumonia. Symptoms of pneumonia include: fever, chills, cough that produces sputum, chest pain and shortness of breath. Pneumonia requires treatment by a physician.



The common cold is a viral infection of the lining of the nose, sinus, throat and bronchial tubes.

The first symptom is usually discomfort in the nose or throat. Later you start sneezing, have a runny nose and feel mildly ill. Usually a fever does not develop.

Secretions from the nose are usually watery, clear and plentiful the first day or two. Later secretions become a thicker yellowish-green and are less abundant.

From here a person, especially a smoker, may develop a cough. Because coughing may be the only way to clear secretions from the airways during a cold, it is preferable to leave a cough untreated unless it interferes with sleep or causes great discomfort.

What to do?

Stay warm and comfortable. Get plenty of rest. Drink fluids. Don't share your infection. WASH YOUR HANDS.

Homeopathic products such as Zicam or Cold-Eeze, may reduce the duration of cough, sore throat and runny nose if started at the first sign of cold symptoms.

Decongestants may help to temporarily make you feel better but are not recommended for persons with high blood pressure. Nasal decongestant sprays can provide relief for up to 8 hours but their use must be restricted to only a few days due to the risk of nasal irritation, dependency and a rebound effect that causes symptoms to return.

Symptoms of the common cold usually last 4-10 days, although a cough often lasts into the second week. A cough may signal the start of bronchitis. This cough is usually dry at first but may become progressively worse and productive with white or yellow sputum. A fever may develop. Wheezing, especially after coughing, is common with bronchitis. If symptoms do not subside and you are concerned about bronchitis, see your physician.

Symptoms	Flu	Cold
fever	yes, 102-104 deg F; last 3-4 days	rare
headache	yes, prominent symptom	rare
general aches, pains	usual; often severe	rare
fatigue, weakness	can last 2-3 weeks	mild
extreme exhaustion	yes, prominent symptom	no
stuffy nose	sometimes	common
sneezing	sometimes	usual
sore throat	sometimes	common
chest discomfort, cough	common; can be severe	mild to moderate; hacky cough
complications	bronchitis, pneumonia	sinus congestion or earache, if a smoker bronchitis
prevention	flu shot	healthy habits
treatment	anti-viral drugs within 24-48 hours after onset of symptoms	only temporary relief of symptoms

(continued on back)

The Common Cold vs. Influenza (flu) (continued)

How to stay healthy

- ~ **Get a flu shot**, especially if you are over 50 or have a chronic illness. Also consider it if you are a CSP or are in contact with a lot of people.
- ~ **Wash your hands frequently**. Not a quick rinse. Use soap and wash for 20 seconds. Bar soap is a perfect breeding ground for viruses and bacteria. Wash your hands frequently with liquid antibacterial soap instead of bar soap.
- ~ **Don't share drinking glasses**. Instead, use disposable cups in the kitchen and bathroom, using each cup once and then dispose.
- ~ **Keep your hands away from your face** to reduce the chance of delivering viruses directly to your eyes or nose. One study found that people typically touched their face 15 times an hour.
- ~ **Take your vitamins** to enhance your immune system. Controversy exists about vitamin C, but one source suggests that 100-200mg of vitamin C twice a day may help prevent illness during the cold and flu season. One cup of orange juice equals 128 mg of vitamin C.
- ~ **Don't smoke**. Smoke paralyzes the cilia, the hair-like cells lining the nose and airways that sweep incoming viruses away before they can infect.
- ~ **Use tissues not hankies** to reduce the spread of infection. BLOW- TOSS- WASH.
- ~ **Sneeze into your shoulder** or elbow not your hand, if you don't have a tissue, to avoid spreading germs. For an amusing educational video on how to cough, watch "Why don't we do it in our sleeves?" at www.coughsafe.com.
- ~ **Reduce stress**. Research has shown that stress reduces your immune response.
- ~ **Get seven to nine hours of sleep at night**. Fatigue increases your chance of getting ill.
- ~ **Reduce your alcohol consumption**. Heavy drinkers suffer more colds and flu and their complications. Even moderate drinking can affect your immune response.
- ~ **Drink plenty of fluids**, at least 8-10 glasses a day. Fluids help to keep the throat moist, loosen mucus and can help to reduce a fever.
- ~ **Stay home from work**, if you are sick with the flu.

CHICKEN-RICE SOUP

5 cups water
2-3 chicken breast halves
1 package Uncle Ben's Wild Rice
1/2 c chopped onions

1 cup chopped celery
1 cup sliced carrots
3 cups chicken broth (canned or bouillon dissolved in water)

Bring 5 cups water to a boil. Add chicken; cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove chicken, cool slightly, cut into bite-sized pieces, and return to broth. Add vegetables to the broth. Add rice with package of seasoning and the 3 cups of broth. Simmer covered until rice is cooked about 30 minutes. Serves 6. Enjoy and get well.

Is the flu shot a good idea for you?

The flu vaccine reduces the average person's chances of catching the flu by up to 80% during the flu season (peak months are November through April). Because the vaccine prevents infection with only a few of the viruses that can cause flu-like symptoms, it isn't a guarantee against getting sick. But even if someone who's gotten the shot gets the flu, symptoms usually will be fewer and milder.

A common myth about the flu shot is that it can actually cause the flu. But the flu shot is made from killed influenza viruses, which means that it's impossible to catch the flu by receiving it. According to the CDC, the flu shot rarely causes serious harm. Some of those vaccinated may have soreness or swelling at the site of the injection or mild side effects, such as headache or low-grade fever. Although these side effects may last for a day, the flu can knock you off your feet for 2 to 3 weeks and can cause complications such as pneumonia and bronchitis.

People who should not get a flu shot include:

- ~ Anyone who's allergic to eggs and egg products (ingredients for flu shots are grown inside eggs)
- ~ Infants under 6 months old
- ~ Anyone who's had a severe reaction to a flu shot
- ~ Anyone with Guillain-Barre syndrome, a rare condition that affects the immune system and nerves
- ~ Anyone currently running a fever

Region V Services will pay for flu shots for all employees this year. The shot only, not an office visit cost. Attach the receipt for whatever you paid to the individual expense record.

It's not an old wives' tale; research conducted by Mount Sinai Medical Center found that drinking hot chicken soup clears nasal passages for 30 minutes. And we can all use a little extra TLC and "comfort food" when we don't feel well.

SOURCES:

womenshealth.about.com,
kidshealth.org,
coughsafe.com, and
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