



“FLU”: WHAT YOU CAN DO CARING FOR PEOPLE AT HOME

Influenza (“flu”) is an illness that can make people feel very sick. The flu germ lives in the nose and throat and can spread from one person to another. When a person with the flu coughs or sneezes, another person nearby (usually within 6 feet) can breathe in the germ.

Many people recover from influenza without serious problems, but other people can become severely ill. Serious problems from the flu can happen to anyone, but are more common in people over 65, pregnant women, people with chronic medical problems, and young children. A person who is at high risk for serious problems should check with their healthcare provider about any special care they may need if they become ill.

Antiviral medication can help lessen symptoms but requires a prescription and must be taken soon after the illness starts to be helpful. Most people do not need antiviral medication to fully recover, but people who are at high risk for serious problems or are in the hospital are often given specific medicine against the influenza virus.

FLU SYMPTOMS

Influenza symptoms usually start one to three days after a person breathes in the germ, but sometimes it can take longer to get sick. Not everyone who breathes in the germ will get sick. People can spread flu one day before they have signs of flu until about three days after. Children with flu can spread it for a longer period of time. A person with flu should stay home for 24 hours after their fever has gone away without the use of fever reducing medicine. For most people, this will be a minimum of 4 days. This is so they do not give the germ to others.

Flu symptoms include:

- Fever
- Body aches or headache
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat and/or dry cough
- Extreme tiredness

FEVER

Fever is a higher than normal body temperature. The fever can start suddenly and last several days. Use a thermometer to measure a person’s temperature. Be sure to read and follow thermometer package directions before taking a person’s temperature. Keep in mind that a person’s normal temperature is different depending on where in the body it is taken.

WHAT TO DO:

MEDICINE TO BRING DOWN A FEVER: YOU CAN USE ACETAMINOPHEN (LIKE TYLENOL ®) OR IBUPROFEN (LIKE MOTRIN ® OR ADVIL ®). BE SURE TO USE A MEDICINE THAT IS RIGHT FOR THE PERSON’S AGE AND FOLLOW THE LABEL DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY. CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT TAKING MEDICINE TO REDUCE FEVER. KEEP MEDICINE OUT OF CHILDREN’S REACH AND NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN (ACETYLSALICYLIC ACID) TO A CHILD UNDER 19 YEARS OF AGE.

KEEP THE ROOM COOL: MAKE SURE THE PERSON IS WEARING LIGHTWEIGHT, COMFORTABLE CLOTHING AND DOES NOT GET TOO WARM.

BATHING: BATHE THE PERSON USING A WASH CLOTH AND LUKEWARM WATER IF THEY CAN'T BATHE THEMSELVES.

NEVER USE RUBBING ALCOHOL TO BRING DOWN A TEMPERATURE. DO NOT COVER THE PERSON IN HEAVY BLANKETS OR HEAVY CLOTHING TO "SWEAT OUT A FEVER." DO NOT PLACE A PERSON IN COLD WATER - THIS CAN CAUSE SHIVERING AND MAKE THE FEVER WORSE.

BODY ACHES

Body aches are a sign of the flu that can last up to a few weeks.

WHAT TO DO:

PAIN MEDICINE: ACETAMINOPHEN (LIKE TYLENOL ®) OR IBUPROFEN (LIKE MOTRIN® OR ADVIL ®) CAN RELIEVE A HEADACHE OR BODY ACHES. BE SURE TO USE A MEDICINE THAT IS RIGHT FOR THE PERSON'S AGE AND FOLLOW THE LABEL DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY. CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT TAKING MEDICINE TO RELIEVE BODY ACHES. KEEP MEDICINE OUT OF CHILDREN'S REACH AND NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN (ACETYLSALICYLIC ACID) TO A CHILD UNDER 19 YEARS OF AGE.

CHANGE POSITION: SOMETIMES CHANGING POSITIONS WHEN AWAKE IN BED CAN HELP BODY ACHES.

STUFFY NOSE

A stuffy nose can be a sign of the flu but usually there are other symptoms present, such as fever, body aches, sore throat, dry cough, and exhaustion/extreme tiredness if influenza is causing the stuffy nose.

WHAT TO DO:

HUMIDIFIER: USE A CLEAN, COOL MIST HUMIDIFIER OR USE STEAM FROM A HOT SHOWER OR BATH (DO NOT GET INTO A HOT SHOWER, JUST BREATHE IN THE STEAM).

SIT UP: HAVING THE PERSON SIT UP OR USE EXTRA PILLOWS UNDER THE HEAD CAN HELP RELIEVE A STUFFY NOSE.

SUCTION BULB: IN CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN 2 YEARS OLD A SUCTION BULB MAY BE USED TO HELP CLEAR AWAY MUCUS.

MEDICATION: DECONGESTANTS (LIKE SUDAFED ®) OR ANTIHISTAMINES (LIKE BENADRYL ®, CLARITIN ®, OR ZYRTEC ®) CAN BE USED TO HELP RELIEVE STUFFY NOSE IN ADULTS BUT DO NOT USE THESE MEDICINES IN CHILDREN UNLESS YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR TELLS YOU TO DO SO. BE SURE TO USE A MEDICINE THAT IS RIGHT FOR THE PERSON'S AGE AND FOLLOW THE LABEL DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY. CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT TAKING MEDICINE TO RELIEVE A STUFFY NOSE. KEEP MEDICINE OUT OF CHILDREN'S REACH AND NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN TO A CHILD UNDER 19 YEARS OF AGE.

DRY COUGH

Dry cough can sometimes lead to a sore throat.

WHAT TO DO

GARGLING: *GARGLING WITH SALT WATER (½ TEASPOON OF SALT MIXED IN A CUP OF WATER) SEVERAL TIMES A DAY CAN MAKE A SORE THROAT FEEL BETTER. DO NOT SWALLOW THE SALT WATER.*

MEDICINE: *COUGH MEDICINES (SUCH AS COUGH SUPPRESSANTS OR EXPECTORANTS) CAN BE USED TO HELP BRING UP MUCUS OR RELIEVE A COUGH IN ADULTS BUT DO NOT USE THESE MEDICINES IN CHILDREN UNLESS YOUR CHILD'S DOCTOR TELLS YOU TO DO SO. BE SURE TO USE A MEDICINE THAT IS RIGHT FOR THE PERSON'S AGE AND FOLLOW THE LABEL DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY. COUGH MEDICINE IS NOT USUALLY RECOMMENDED FOR YOUNG CHILDREN BECAUSE IT IS INEFFECTIVE (IT DOES NOT WORK) AND IT CAN HAVE BAD SIDE EFFECTS.*

DEHYDRATION

Dehydration happens when people lose more fluids than they take in. Signs of dehydration are feeling thirsty, dry mouth, dark urine, less urine, dizziness, and headache.

WHAT TO DO

FLUIDS: *BE SURE TO DRINK PLENTY OF CLEAR LIQUIDS SUCH AS WATER, JUICES, SOUPS, AND BROTHS. OFFER SMALL AMOUNTS OF FLUID TO THE SICK PERSON AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO DRINK OFTEN.*

REST: *BE SURE TO GET PLENTY OF REST.*

AVOID: *AVOID ALCOHOL AND CAFFEINE (SUCH AS COFFEE, TEA, AND SODA WITH CAFFEINE).*

WHEN TO CONTACT THE DOCTOR

Get emergency medical care if you or someone you know has any of the signs below:

- Has trouble breathing or chest pain
- Has purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- Is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- Has signs of dehydration, such as dizziness when standing, less urine, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry
- Has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions or shakes)
- Is less responsive than normal or becomes confused
- Has signs of flu that improve but then return with fever and a worse cough
- Has a fever with rash
- Has any signs that are especially worrisome or concerning

PREVENT FLU

1. **Get a flu vaccine.** Flu vaccine given every year is the best way to prevent getting the flu.
2. **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then, throw the tissue away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough into your upper sleeve.
3. **Wash your hands** with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
4. **Stay away from people who are sick.** If you are sick, stay home.
5. **Clean surfaces** in your home with a household cleaner.
6. **Avoid** touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
7. **Try to stay in good health** by getting plenty of sleep, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

CAREGIVER INFORMATION

Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible. For example, a sick person may be able to sleep in a different room or use a different bathroom than healthy people in the home. Caregivers should avoid being face to face with a sick person as much as possible and clean their hands often, especially after touching objects used by the sick person (e.g. tissues, laundry) or having close contact with the sick person. If possible, avoid having a pregnant woman care for the sick person. Laundry and eating utensils do not need to be washed separately but should be washed with soap and hot water before someone else uses them. Those who already have serious medical problems and are in close contact with the sick person should call their healthcare provider to talk about any special care they may need or medication they should take.

Caregivers should monitor themselves for flu symptoms and should call their healthcare provider if they have these.

SUPPLIES

TO TAKE CARE OF SOMEONE WITH THE FLU

1. Soap or alcohol-based sanitizer for washing hands
2. Drinks, such as water, juice, and soups
3. Food that is easy to digest such as apple sauce, rice, toast, pudding, bananas, or soups
4. Extra supply of special foods, medicine, or equipment that the person usually needs
5. Cleaning supplies such as household cleaner, paper towels, and trash bags
6. Non-aspirin pain relievers such as acetaminophen (like Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (like Advil® or Motrin®)
7. Cough syrup for older children and adults
8. A digital thermometer (Glass thermometers should not be used because they can contain mercury, a toxin)

**For more information, please contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Infectious Disease Bureau
(617) 534-5611 or www.bphc.org**