

What to do if you have the flu

Health Facts

The flu is much worse than a bad cold. Its real name is influenza, an infection in the airways caused by a virus. Flu is easily caught and easily spread. The virus can live for days on the surface of toys, coffee makers, door knobs, computer keyboards and other hard surfaces. Although some symptoms may be cold-like, they are far more serious and can include headaches, chills and a dry cough, as well as body aches and fever. While the fever declines on the second or third day of the illness, full recovery may take up to six (6) weeks.

While most people recover fully, the flu may lead to more severe and life-threatening illnesses such as pneumonia. This may result in hospitalization and even death. Vaccination is the best prevention.

If you do get the flu, rest and drink plenty of fluids. The aches and fever can be treated with acetaminophen. If your symptoms do not improve, see your doctor; you may be suffering from serious side effects of the flu. Antibiotics have no effect against a viral illness like the flu.

To reduce your chances of getting or spreading the flu, it is recommended that you:

- Get the influenza vaccine;
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and warm water;
- Do not share towels;
- Do not share drinks or eating utensils;
- Use disposable tissues (not handkerchiefs);
- Dispose of contaminated tissues appropriately;
- Minimize your contact with ill individuals;
- Try to keep ill individuals away from infants, elderly and individuals with chronic medical conditions;
- Get lots of rest and adequate nutrition;
- Clean and sanitize contaminated surfaces (washrooms, kitchens, telephones, etc.);
- Watch for symptoms of the flu in other household members;
- Get anti-virals as recommended by your physician to ill individuals or contacts of ill individuals, if available;
- Cover mouth when coughing;
- Designate a healthy person to prepare and serve food, if possible;
- Stay home if symptoms of influenza begin;
- Call the health unit if you have any questions.

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