

Influenza

The flu is a serious respiratory infection that affects millions of people each year and spreads easily through the respiratory droplets of an infected person. Although recovery may take several days, most people recover from the flu (including H1N1 flu) with rest and proper self care strategies. **UHS does not give class excuses for the flu.**

What are flu symptoms?

- Fever (usually 100 degrees or greater) **and** cough and/or sore throat
- Other symptoms may include: body aches, chills, mild headache, runny nose and /or nasal congestion, and occasionally vomiting or diarrhea.

What should I do if I've been diagnosed with the flu or have influenza-like symptoms?

- People who are pregnant, have a chronic medical condition (such as asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, or heart disease), or are immunocompromised, are at greater risk for developing severe illness from the flu. If you, or anyone you have been in close contact with while ill, have these conditions, contact UHS or a healthcare provider as soon as possible.

Treatment recommendations

Following these basic guidelines can help ease your discomfort and speed your recovery.

- **Have personal care items available** such as hand sanitizer, tissues, and over-the-counter medicines to treat flu symptoms, a thermometer, and fluids. It takes about a week to recover from the flu so make sure you have enough supplies available for this time period.
- **Let someone know that you are sick.** Ask a friend to check on you daily while you're not feeling well.
- **Increase your fluid intake.** Drinking more fluids will help you stay hydrated and better control your temperature. Fluids such as water, sports drinks and clear broth soups are generally well tolerated.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Stay in bed and rest as much as possible.
- **Wash your hands frequently.** Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers after coughing, sneezing and wiping your nose to reduce the spread of the virus.
- **Cover all coughs and sneezes** with a disposable tissue and discard immediately into a trash can.
- **Isolate yourself in your room or home** until at least 24 hours after fever has cleared without the use of fever-

reducing medications. This means that your temperature should be below 100 degrees for at least this time period.

For **FEVER, CHILLS AND BODY ACHES** use an NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication, like ibuprofen (generic Motrin or Advil) or naproxen (generic Aleve). The major side effect of NSAIDs is irritation of the stomach, occasionally leading to gastrointestinal ulceration and bleeding. Stop the medication if you have stomach upset or pain. Consider taking acetaminophen (Tylenol), instead, for fever and pain if you have stomach upset.

DO NOT TAKE ASPIRIN.

For **STUFFY NOSE AND CONGESTION** use a decongestant. The only effective oral decongestant currently available is pseudoephedrine. You must ask the pharmacist for this medication (regulated because of illegal use to make methamphetamine), although no prescription is required. Decongestants purchased off the shelf contain phenylephrine and are much less effective. Oral decongestants may produce rapid heart rate, blood pressure elevation, nervous stimulation, and restlessness which may interfere with sleep.

An alternative to the oral medication is a decongestant nose spray oxymetazoline hydrochloride (generic Afrin). This can rapidly relieve nasal obstruction. When the decongestant effect of the drug wears off, nasal obstruction rapidly returns. Therefore, **this can be very effective, but limit use to 3 days (if used twice daily) or 5-6 nights (if only used at bedtime).** Overuse by just a few days can result in "rebound" obstruction and mucosal damage.

For **RUNNY NOSE, SNEEZING AND COUGH** try an antihistamine. The most effective antihistamines are first generation, although they tend to cause drowsiness. Examples of first generation antihistamines are brompheniramine (generic for DimeTapp), chlorpheniramine (generic for Chlor-Trimeton and Singlet), diphenhydramine (generic for Benadryl), and doxylamine (generic for NyQuil and Alka-Seltzer Plus Night-Time Cold Medicine).

The newer (non-sedating) antihistamines **do not** appear to have the same degree of effectiveness for treating colds. Examples are Loratadine (Claritin), Fexofenadine (Allegra – prescription required), and Certirizine (Zyrtec).

For **COUGH** you can try a cough suppressant. Cough suppressants are natural narcotics, like codeine, and synthetic narcotics, like dextromethorphan (DM). They act on the brain to depress the cough reflex center. Their effectiveness in

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patients with chronic cough has been demonstrated in controlled studies but there is little **published information on their effectiveness in coughs associated with colds**. Cough suppressants can produce gastrointestinal discomfort but otherwise have few side effects. In normal healthy people with good cough reflexes, cough suppressants are safe.

Drug interactions may occur with DM and certain anti-depressants. If you are on an antidepressant, discuss this with your provider.

For **SORE THROAT OR NASAL CONGESTION** consider using a saline rinse. Various nasal saline rinse kits are available commercially or you can make your own saline by mixing ½ teaspoon of salt and 8 ounces of warm water in a clean container:

For the nose: Place the above mixture in a reusable sinus rinse bottle or draw up into a nasal bulb syringe. The most convenient way to perform a sinus rinse is in the shower or over a sink.

For the throat: Swish and spit

Keeping a **throat lozenge**, cough drop, or hard candy in your mouth will stimulate your saliva and help soothe your throat.

If you have the flu or viral illness and any of the following symptoms or conditions you need to seek medical evaluation as soon as possible.

- Fever greater than 101° or increasing over 2-3 days
- Fever that does not improve with medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath (not due to nasal congestion)
- Severe headache or neck stiffness or pain
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Dizziness or confusion
- Vomiting
- Rash
- Difficulty swallowing fluids
- Flu-like symptoms not improving after 2-3 days
- Flu-like symptoms that were improving, but now are getting worse

In an emergency go to Mount Nittany Medical Center or call 911 for an ambulance.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Send secure message to advice nurse via the UHS website or call 814- 863-4463.

Appointments

Appointments can be made online via the UHS website, by phone 814-863-0774, or in person. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call or go online to cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

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