

Information about the Flu

By now, most of you have heard that the flu is headed our way and/or has arrived. This year's flu has been severe, especially in young children and older adults, and has required more hospitalizations than usual. Schools are taking measures to prevent the spread of the flu, such as, educating students about the importance of good hand washing, supplying tissues and encouraging students who are sick to stay home from school until feeling better. Below is information taken from the Center of Disease Control and Prevention's web site about the flu. We thought this information would be helpful for you. It includes symptoms of the flu, what to do if you suspect you have the flu, how to prevent the flu and the difference between the common cold and the flu. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu.

Symptoms of the Flu

Influenza (commonly called "the flu") is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The usual flu season ranges from November through March, and even past March in some years. The flu is very contagious and can result in severe illness and life-threatening complications. The flu is different from a cold. It usually comes on suddenly and may include these "flu-like" symptoms:

- Fever (usually high, 102-104 degrees F)
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

What You Should Do If You Get the Flu

If you develop the flu, you should get plenty of rest and drink a lot of liquids. Also, you can take medications, such as Tylenol (acetaminophen), to relieve the symptoms of flu (never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – and particularly fever – without first speaking to your doctor). Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work to cure it. You should avoid contact with other people, including those at school or work, until 24 hours after your temperature returns to normal without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Certain people are at increased risk for serious complications from the flu. This includes people 65 years or older, people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, very young children and children with certain health conditions, such as asthma. If you are in one of these categories, talk with your doctor about getting a flu vaccine. If your flu symptoms are unusually severe (for example, if you are having trouble breathing) you should consult your healthcare provider right away. Your doctor may choose to use certain antiviral drugs to treat the flu.

Some of the complications caused by flu include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may get sinus congestion and ear infections.

Ways to prevent the Flu and other respiratory illnesses:

Vaccination: The single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated each fall but it is not too late to get one now. Check with your doctor's office or local pharmacy to get your flu shot today. Listed below are other ways to protect against flu:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home from work or school if you or your child is sick. Don't go out to public places (stores, restaurants) if you can avoid doing so. Being exposed to more germs can make your sickness worse and spread your illness to others.
- Wash your hands often (before and after eating, after using the toilet; after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose).
- Turn your head and cough or sneeze into a tissue and promptly dispose of the used tissue; or cough into the inside of the elbow if a tissue is not available.
- Do not share anything that goes into the mouth such as drinking cups and straws.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets) if someone in the house has a cold or the flu.
- Do not smoke around children or in vehicles where children ride.
- Your child should be fever free without the use of fever-reducing medications such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Advil/Motrin (ibuprofen) for 24 hours before returning to school.

Is it a Cold or the Flu?

Colds and flu are both highly contagious and, in the initial stages, a bad cold and a mild case of the flu might seem alike. However, flu is a serious illness that can have life-threatening complications, unlike colds. Check this table for a comparison of the symptoms for each illness.

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Fever	rare in adults and older children, but can be as high as 102° F in infants and small children	usually 102° F, but can go up to 104° F and usually lasts 3 to 4 days
Headache	rare	sudden onset and can be severe
Muscle aches	mild	usual, and often severe
Tiredness and Weakness	mild	often extreme, and can last two or more weeks
Extreme exhaustion	never	sudden onset and can be severe
Runny nose	often	sometimes
Sneezing	often	sometimes
Sore throat	often	sometimes
Cough	mild hacking cough	usual, and can become severe

We hope this information helps. Please call your school nurse or primary care provider if you have further questions.