

HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter
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Fighting the Flu

Flu Symptoms

Introduction

The flu is defined as a contagious respiratory virus caused by the influenza virus. It has the ability to affect the nose, throat, and, in some cases, may even effect the lungs. The flu can cause mild to severe symptoms and in rare cases lead to death. The influenza virus effects roughly 8% of the population each year starting in October and peaking between December and February. Those at high risk for contracting the influenza virus include: residents of nursing homes, pregnant or postpartum women, those suffering from chronic illness, and those that are obese. Children under the ages of 18 are twice as likely to contract the influenza virus while adults over the age of 65 have the smallest chance. However, if diagnosed, this population tends to experience more severe symptoms.

The flu will present with symptoms that may include a fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, and fatigue. Young children may experience nausea and vomiting but is rarely seen in older adults. Flu symptoms may not occur until up to 2-4 days after the individual has been exposed to the influenza virus. The flu may also lead to other complications like bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, or a sinus infection.

Is it the flu or a cold?

Many flu symptoms are also commonly seen with a cold. Because the initial symptoms present similarly, it can make it hard to differentiate between the flu and a cold. This chart offers information on the most commonly seen symptoms to better distinguish between a cold or the flu.

Symptoms	If It's a Cold	If It's the Flu
Fever	Rare	Usual
Headache	Rare	Common
General aches, pains	Slight	Usual; often severe
Tiredness, weakness	Sometimes	Usual; can last 2 to 3 weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Rare	Usual; when first become sick
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate hacking cough	Common; can become severe

How long is someone contagious?

Someone diagnosed with the flu is considered contagious

from one day prior to the start of symptoms until up to a week later. Younger children and adults with compromised immune systems may be contagious for a few days longer. After being diagnosed with the flu, a general guideline is that it is best to stay home and away from large crowds until your fever has been absent for a minimum of 24 hours without the help of any medication.

How does it spread?

The flu spreads from person to person through small droplets made when people talk, cough, or sneeze. These droplets have the ability to spread to anyone within a six foot radius of the person spreading it. Though less common, these droplets may also be transferred by touching a surface that has been infected by the influenza virus.

Flu Vaccinations

The best way to prevent yourself from contracting the influenza virus is by receiving a flu vaccine each year. It is important to get a flu shot yearly as the influenza virus changes slightly from year to year. It takes researchers roughly 6 months each year to modify the flu vaccine in order to give the most protection from the new strain. After receiving the vaccine, allow

roughly 2 weeks for your immune system to build the necessary antibodies to fight the flu. This means that the best time of year to receive the flu shot is in October. But, if you have not received your flu shot yet, it isn't too late. Talk to your doctor and get protected! A common myth is that the shot actually can give you the flu. While you may experience some flu like symptoms such as slight muscle aches and pains and have a fever for a few days, this is not actually the flu. This response is just your immune system creating antibodies to help fight the actual influenza virus.

Other Flu Prevention Methods

Other ways to help decrease your chances of getting the flu include frequent hand washing using soap and warm water. If soap and water is unavailable, use a hand sanitizer in its place. Try to avoid touching your hands to your mouth or eyes unless they have just been

washed. When around people, cover your cough or sneeze with the bend of your arm to prevent the spread of droplets. Practicing good health will also boost your immune system allowing your body to better fight the flu. This includes getting daily exercise, 7-8 hours of sleep nightly, eating a nutritious diet and managing stress.

References

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Other News

**If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Kayla Leal, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.

