

Influenza: Care Guidelines

The following provides information to help you as you recover from the flu (influenza). If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your doctor.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your doctor's office.

What to Expect

During the first few days of the flu you may have a fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some of these signs, such as a cough, may last longer. But with the proper care, most people begin to feel better after 5 to 7 days.

Here are some ways to help you recover and prevent spreading the flu to others.

Taking Care

Activity

Try to get as much rest as you can. As you begin to feel better, slowly increase your activity, but do not become over tired. Plan for rest periods during the day.

Stay home and limit contact with others. This will help prevent the spread of the flu and speed your recovery. Also be sure to:

- Clean your hands often with either soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your shirt sleeve rather than your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as germs spread this way.

After 24 hours with no fever (and without use of medicine to reduce a fever), you may return to work or school.

Diet

Drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, and electrolyte beverages for infants).

Medicines

For Adults

If you have a sore throat, try gargling with warm salt water. Mix ¼ teaspoon of salt in half a cup (4 oz.) of warm water.

If your doctor prescribed an antiviral drug (i.e., Tamiflu® or Relenza®), start taking the medicine as soon as you can. The medicine works best during the first 2 days of the flu. Be sure to finish taking all the medicine, even if you feel better.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can help relieve fever and aching. Over-the-counter cold and flu medications may also be used, but they may also contain acetaminophen.

Do not take more than 4,000 mg of acetaminophen per day. Many remedies contain acetaminophen. Be sure to read labels carefully.

Ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®, Nuprin®), also called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), can be used to ease discomfort. Check with your doctor before taking any NSAIDs if you have kidney disease or stomach problems.

Never use aspirin or medicines that contain aspirin (like Pepto-Bismol™) when you have the flu. Aspirin may cause Reye's syndrome, a rare disease that causes liver failure and can be fatal.

For Children

When caring for children who are ill, always follow the doctor's guidelines for giving medicines. This includes both prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.

When to Call the Doctor

If you notice any of the following, contact your doctor right away. If you are unable to reach your doctor, go to the hospital emergency room

In Children

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing.
- Bluish skin color.
- Not waking up or not interacting.
- So irritable does not want to be held.
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and worse cough.
- Fever.
 - Any fever over 100° F in children less than 2 months old.
 - Fever over 100° F lasting more than 3 days in children over 2 months old.

- Severe or persistent vomiting; unable to keep liquids down for more than 12 hours.
- Signs of dehydration (dry mouth, decreased urine output, weak, sunken eyes).
- If baby has a dry diaper (no urine) for 8 hours.

In Adults

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen.
- Sudden dizziness.
- Confusion.
- Severe or persistent vomiting; unable to keep liquids down for more than 24 hours.
- Headache becomes more severe; stiff neck or confusion.
- Little or no urine output in 24 hours.
- Fever and cough return after recovery from the flu.
- Flu signs become worse or persist for more than 7 days.

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women's Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar a el departamento de representantes para pacientes al 312-926-3112.

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