Flu (Influenza)

Every year about 20,000 to 40,000 deaths are due to Flu and its complications, mainly in older people (age 65 and older) and people with *chronic* (longstanding) medical problems. The costs of treating Flu are estimated to be more than 12 billion dollars annually.

Flu (influenza) is a viral infection usually caused by Influenza Type A and Type B viruses. It is most commonly seen in fall and winter. Flu is very *contagious* (easily spread from one person to other). It is usually spread by coughing or sneezing, which cause it to enter the air from where other persons can inhale it. Flu enters the body through mouth, nose or eyes.

SYMPTOMS OF FLU

Symptoms (problems) usually start with sudden onset of high fever, chills, fatigue, weakness, sore throat, cough, body aches (muscle or joint pain), headache, and stuffy nose. Cough and weakness can last for several weeks in some people.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FLU AND COLD:

Both Cold and Flu are viral infections and can cause similar symptoms. Generally, cold is a minor infection of nose and throat, while Flu is usually more severe with high fevers, aching and weakness. The following information can help you to understand the differences between Cold and Flu.

SYMPTOMS: Onset
COLD: Gradual
FLU: Sudden

SYMPTOMS: Fever
COLD: Rare and usually low
FLU: Over 101°F, last 3-4 days

SYMPTOMS: Cough
COLD: Hacking
FLU: Dry, Can be severe

SYMPTOMS: Sore throat
COLD: Common
FLU: Sometimes

SYMPTOMS: Sneezing
COLD: Usual
FLU: Sometimes

SYMPTOMS: Stuffy nose
COLD: Common
FLU: Sometimes

SYMPTOMS: Chest discomfort
COLD: Mild to moderate
FLU: Common

SYMPTOMS: Headache
COLD: Rare

FLU: Prominent

SYMPTOMS: Muscle aches
COLD: Slight
FLU: Common and severe

SYMPTOMS: Weakness and fatigue
COLD: Mild
FLU: Can last up to 3 weeks

SYMPTOMS: Extreme exhaustion
COLD: Never
FLU: Early and Prominent

TREATMENT OF FLU

Because Flu is caused by a virus, *antibiotics* (which are used to treat bacterial infections) do not work. If your physician does not prescribe antibiotics, do not insist, because inappropriate use of antibiotics can lead to many problems, including antibiotic-resistant *bacteria* (germs). Physicians may prescribe antibiotics for some people who are at risk for complications of Flu, like pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus infection, ear infection, etc.

There are treatments available for Flu (called antiviral medications). They must be started early, within 48 hours after the onset (start) of symptoms otherwise they will not shorten the course of the illness.

Never give aspirin to children who have Flu, or any other illness, which may be caused by a virus. Aspirin use in flu may cause Reye's Syndrome, a potentially severe illness.

If you have symptoms of Flu, you should get plenty of bed rest and fluids. Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver. Try to stay at home to avoid passing (*transmission*) to other people.

FLU VACCINE

- Flu vaccine is the most effective of preventing Flu, even though Flu vaccine is not 100% effective. If the *strains* (types) of the Flu virus are not the same as predicted when preparing the Flu vaccine, it may not prevent Flu.
- If you are allergic to eggs, or you have had allergic reaction to Flu vaccine in the past, you should not be getting Flu vaccine. Check with your physician for further information.

People who are at a greater risk for developing serious complications from Flu or persons who can transmit Flu to those at high risk are recommended to have Flu vaccine each year. These include:

- Persons age 65 and older.
- Persons with chronic diseases like heart disease (congestive heart failure, etc.) or lung disease (asthma, emphysema, COPD, etc.), kidney disease, blood disorders, immune system disorders (HIV, transplant patients, etc.), children and teenagers receiving long term aspirin therapy, etc.
- Healthcare workers (nurses, physicians, etc.).
- Employees of nursing homes.
- Household contacts of persons at high risk.
- Women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the flu season.
- Any person who wants to reduce the risk of becoming ill with Flu.

PREVENTION OF FLU:

As mentioned earlier Flu vaccine is the most effective way of preventing Flu. Other measures, which can reduce your risk of getting Flu, are:

- Wash your hands frequently.

- Carefully clean dishes, utensils, and glasses immediately after use.
- Avoid contact with persons who have Flu-like symptoms.
- Stop smoking and avoid second-hand cigarette smoke.

Read and follow all the directions given by the physician, pharmacist, and the information accompanying the medications.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You feel you are seriously ill.
- You have chest pain, shortness of breath, facial pain or swelling, earache.
- You have severe vomiting or diarrhea, and you are unable to keep fluids down.
- You are coughing up discolored or bloody mucus.

NOTE: This information is intended only to help patients take better care of their illness and does not cover all aspects of the management of the disease. If the caregiver has given any specific instructions about the management of your illness you are recommended to follow the caregiver's advice. If you do not understand any instruction, or are unable to follow the above suggestions, please contact your caregiver.

Document Released: 02/26/2003 Document Re-Released: 09/26/2009
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