Colds & Flu, What to do

A cold and the flu, also called influenza, are alike in many ways. But the flu can sometimes lead to more serious problems, like pneumonia. A stuffy nose, sore throat, and sneezing are usually signs of a cold. Tiredness, fever, headache, and major aches and pains probably mean you have the flu. Coughing can be a sign of either a cold or the flu. But a bad cough usually points to the flu.

AVOIDING A COLD

- Wash your hands often. You can pick up cold germs easily, even when shaking someone's hand or touching doorknobs or handrails.
- Avoid people with colds when possible.
- If you sneeze or cough, do it into a tissue and then throw the tissue away.
- Clean surfaces you touch with a germ-killing disinfectant.
- Do not touch your nose, eyes or mouth. Germs can enter your body easily by these paths.

AVOIDING THE FLU

- A flu shot can greatly lower your chance of getting the flu. The best time to get the shot is from the middle of October to the middle of November, because most people get the flu in the winter.
- The shot cannot cause the flu. But, you may feel sore, weak, or have a fever for a couple of days.

WHO SHOULD GET THE FLU SHOT?

- Children aged 6 months until their 5th birthday.
- Pregnant women.
- People 50 years of age and older.
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions.
- People who live in nursing homes and long term care facilities.
  - Household contacts of people at high risk for complications from the flu.
  - Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age.
  - Health care workers.
- Anyone who wants to decrease their risk of influenza.

MEDICINE FOR PREVENTION AND/OR RELIEF

- If you are one of those who are not advised to get the flu shot, ask your caregiver about prescription medicine to help prevent flu. If you get the flu, taking this medicine within the first 48 hours can make your illness less serious.
- **Do not take antibiotics for a cold or flu.** Antibiotics will not work against cold and flu germs. Antibiotics should be taken only when really needed.

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF FEEL BETTER

A cold usually lasts only a couple of days to a week. Tiredness from the flu may continue for several weeks. To feel better while you are sick:

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get plenty of rest.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your symptoms get worse.
- Your symptoms last a long time.
- After feeling a little better, you develop signs of a more serious problem. Some of these signs are *nausea* (sick-to-your-stomach feeling), vomiting, high fever, shaking chills, chest pain, or coughing with thick, yellow-green mucus.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Information courtesy of the US Food and Drug Administration and Center for Disease Control.

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