

Healthwatch: Fighting Colds and Flu Ann Pinning, MSN, FNP-BC

We're entering cold and flu season and I'd like to arm you with some advice on how to protect yourself from these viruses.

Cold viruses attack through respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes, or when you touch contaminated surfaces then transfer those germs to your eyes, nose or mouth (thus the constant reminders to "COVER YOUR COUGH" and "keep your hands out of your eyes, nose and mouth".) Cold viruses usually run a course of 3-14 days, with improvement in symptoms after 7 days.

Flu viruses enter the body the same way, but can cause a more severe illness lasting 7-14 days, or longer. Both viruses cause similar symptoms including nasal congestion, cough, sore throat, headache and fatigue. The flu virus, though, attacks with gusto, generally with a rapid onset and greater intensity of symptoms. Flu sufferers generally experience extreme fatigue, severe muscle and joint pain and higher fevers, up to 104. Many will say they feel as though they've been hit by a truck.

If you've been the victim of a viral attack: Please stay home, especially if you have a fever or feel that you may have the flu. You or your children may return to work or school safely if your temperature has been normal for 24 hours (without the help of fever reducer). Get plenty of rest and drink plenty of clear fluids including water, juice, and caffeine free teas. Drink up to 8-10 glasses of water daily unless you've been told to limit fluids. Use OTC medications with caution:

- Ibuprofen or acetaminophen is safe for pain or fever. Reduce fevers that are greater than 102.5, but let low grade fevers work with the body's natural defense in killing the virus. A tepid bath also helps to bring a fever down. *Never give aspirin to a child due to the risk of Reye's syndrome.*
- Cough and cold remedies are not recommended for children under age 4. Avoid overuse of multi symptom remedies. They are not curative, and research shows they provide symptomatic relief in only 50% of cases. Choose the remedy that provides relief for the specific symptom(s) that you have.

- If you feel a cold coming on, Zinc supplements have been proven to be beneficial in shortening the duration of the illness. *Oscillococcinum* is a homeopathic remedy for the flu and might help minimize symptoms.

Use a saline solution of ¼ tsp salt to 1 cup water to gently rinse your nose. This helps promote drainage and keeps the nasal passages and mucous membranes moist. Saline also works well as a throat gargle. Use it every few hours as needed for relief of congestion and/or pain.

When is it time to call in the troops?

Antibiotics will do nothing for a virus, but occasionally individuals will develop bacterial infections after a cold or flu. It is important to see your doctor if after 5 days your symptoms are worse or you are not improving by day 7. Also, seek medical attention if you develop shortness of breath, pain or pressure in your chest or high fever that isn't reduced by fever reducer, confusion, fainting, persistent vomiting, poor urine output (you should be urinating every 6 hours at least), facial pain or swelling.

Build your defense:

Wash your hands frequently and keep your hands out of your eyes, nose and mouth. Use a saline rinse in your nose, and gargle salt water daily to help clear viruses and keep membranes healthy. Stay well rested. Once we become fatigued or stressed, our immune system is not as efficient at fighting infections. Strengthen your immune system. Some research has shown probiotics used regularly help reduce the rate of infection in children and adults.

Get your flu shot NOW!

PPH shot clinics

Adults 18 yrs and older. Cost \$20 for age 18-64, \$15 age 65 and older. PPH will bill Medicare and some Medicare supplements.

Ramona Senior Center

434 Aqua Lane

10/4/10 8:30 am-noon

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church

411 6th St

10/3/10 8:30 am-noon

CVS, Sav-On and Rite Aid pharmacies provide flu shots to adults, usually by appointment.

Costs range from \$26-30.

MinuteClinic 12358 Poway Rd

Daily 10-6:30 (closed 2-3 lunch) Walk in only.

Ages 18 months and older. \$29.95

Visit www.minuteclinic.com for insurance listings.