

## Influenza: Care Guidelines

Following these care guidelines will help you as you recover from the flu (influenza). If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your physician.

*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your physician'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. However, with the proper care, most people begin to feel better after 5 to 7 days.

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

### Ways to take care of yourself

#### **Activity**

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

Stay home and limit your 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 instead of your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

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

#### **Diet**

Drink clear fluids such as water, broth, sports drinks and pediatric electrolyte drinks.

## **Medications**

### **For adults**

If you have a sore throat, try gargling with warm salt water. Mix 1/4 teaspoon of salt with 1/2 cup (4 ounces) of warm water.

If your physician prescribed an antiviral medication such as oseltamivir phosphate (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®), start taking it as soon as you can. These medications work best when taken during the first 2 days of the flu. Be sure to finish taking all of 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 milligrams (mg) of acetaminophen in 24 hours. Many medications contain acetaminophen. Be sure to read labels carefully.

Talk with your physician about the 24-hour limit of acetaminophen that is right for you. If you are fasting or undernourished, have diabetes, are taking isoniazid, or frequently drink alcohol, you may need to limit acetaminophen to 2,000 to 3,000 mg per day in divided doses. It is possible your physician may tell you not to take acetaminophen at all.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®, Nuprin®), can be used to ease discomfort. Check with your physician before taking an NSAID if you have kidney disease or stomach problems.

If you are younger than 18 years, you should never use aspirin or medications that contain aspirin (like Pepto-Bismol®) when they 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 their physician's guidelines for giving medicines. This includes prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.

## **When to call the physician**

If you notice any of these symptoms, contact your physician right way. If you are unable to reach the physician, go to the nearest emergency department.

### **In children**

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Very irritable and does not want to be held
- Fever and cough return after flu-like symptoms improve

- Fever
  - Temperature more than 100 degrees F in children 2 months old or younger
  - Temperature more than 100 degrees F lasting more than 3 days in children older than 2 months
- Severe or persistent vomiting; unable to keep liquids down for more than 12 hours
- Signs of dehydration (dry mouth, decreased urine output, feeling weak, sunken eyes)
- A baby with 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 flu-like symptoms improve
- Flu symptoms become worse or last for more than 7 days