

Toolbox Safety Topic

Flu Season

I. The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each fall, but since that isn't an option this year for the majority of us due to vaccine shortages, we may have to find other ways of staying healthy. Symptoms and complications of the flu include: fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, and nausea/vomiting/diarrhea. Complications caused by the flu virus include: bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, worsening of chronic medical conditions, and sinus problems and ear infections in children.

II. Each year in the U.S., an average of 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu. Of those, more than 200,000 are hospitalized from complications, and approximately 36,000 people die! Those at higher risk for serious flu complications include people over age 50, young children, and people with certain health conditions such as pregnancy, diabetes, lung disease, impaired immune systems, kidney problems, etc.

III. According to WebMD, when should you see a doctor for a cold or the flu?

- Difficulty breathing or chest pain.** A cold or the flu should not make you short of breath or cause pain in your chest. These could be symptoms of a more serious problem.
- Persistent fever.** This can be a sign of a secondary infection in your body that should be treated.
- Vomiting or inability to keep fluids down.** Your body needs fluids to stay hydrated. If you can't keep them down, you should go to the hospital to receive fluids intravenously.
- Painful swallowing.** Minor discomfort is common, but severe pain when swallowing can be a sign of an infection or injury that needs to be treated.
- Persistent coughing.** Usually a cough that won't go away is just postnasal drip that may be treated with antihistamines. It could, however, be related to asthma or GERD, both of which can be treated by your doctor. If you have an unexplained cough that lasts for more than 2 to 3 weeks, your doctor may want to try an antibiotic to treat this type of infection.
- Persistent congestion and headaches.** Colds and allergies that cause congestion and blockage of the sinus passages can lead to a sinus infection. If you have symptoms that don't go away with usual medication, you may need to be treated with antibiotics.

IV. Flu spreads in the respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. It usually spreads from person to person, though occasionally a person may become infected by touching something with virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Studies have shown that the flu virus can survive on inanimate items and surfaces for 2 to 8 hours! So what can you do to prevent getting the flu (besides getting the vaccine)?

- Wash your hands!** Often! If no sink is available, rub your hands together very hard for a minute or so, this helps break up most of the germs.
- Don't cover your sneezes and coughs with your hands.** Use a tissue and then throw it away. If you don't have a tissue, turn your head away from people and cough into the air, or into your upper sleeve.
- Don't touch your face.** The flu virus can enter your body through the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Drink plenty of fluids.** Water flushes your system, washing out the poisons as it rehydrates you. A typical healthy adult needs eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids a day. (You can tell if you're getting enough fluids when your urine turns clear. Deep yellow indicates a need for more fluids.)

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- Take a sauna (or a hot shower).** A German study found that people who steamed twice a week got half as many colds as those who didn't. It is believed that the hot air inhaled is actually too hot for cold and flu viruses to survive.
 - Get fresh air.** In cold weather, heating systems dry you out and make your body more vulnerable to cold and flu viruses. Also, when it's cold and people stay indoors, more germs are circulating in dry, crowded rooms.
 - Do aerobic exercise regularly.** Aerobic exercise speeds up the heart to pump larger quantities of blood; makes you breathe faster; and makes you sweat. This helps increase the body's natural virus-killing cells.
 - Eat foods containing phytochemicals.** "Phyto" means plants. The natural chemicals in plants give the vitamins in food a supercharged boost. Eat dark, green, red, and yellow fruits and vegetables.
 - Eat yogurt.** Some studies have shown that eating a daily cup of low-fat yogurt can reduce your susceptibility to colds by 25 percent.
 - Don't smoke.** Statistics show that heavy smokers get more severe colds and more frequent ones. Even being around smoke profoundly zaps the immune system. Smoke dries out your nasal passages and paralyzes cilia (the delicate hairs that line the mucous membranes in your nose and lungs). Cilia wave back and forth to sweep cold and flu viruses out of the nasal passages.
 - Cut alcohol consumption.** Heavy alcohol use destroys the liver, the body's primary filtering system, which means that germs of all kinds won't leave your body as fast, making you more prone to initial infections as well as secondary complications. Alcohol also dehydrates the body.
 - Relax.** There's evidence that when you relax, interleukins in the immune system increase in the bloodstream, helping to fight against cold and flu viruses. You should relax about 30 minutes a day and it can be learned. Keep in mind that people who try to relax, but are in fact bored, are not reaping the benefits!
- V. Healthy people typically recover from the flu in 7 to 10 days, with the worst symptoms lasting 3 to 4 days. If you get the flu anyway, what can you do to recover as fast as possible?
- Stay home when you are sick!** Help prevent others from catching your illness.
 - Get extra rest.**
 - Drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost from fever.** Hot liquids relieve nasal congestion, prevent dehydration, and soothe the inflamed membranes in the nose and throat. Try hot tea with lemon and soup. Cool liquids, such as water or fruit juice help replace lost fluids and prevent dehydration.
 - Apply **petroleum jelly** around the nose and lips if the skin gets sore from repeated rubbing with tissues.
 - Medications** can be taken to relieve the symptoms of flu, but they don't cure. Keep in mind that many of the symptoms you want to treat are actually part of the natural healing process! Fever is your body's way of trying to kill viruses in a hotter-than-normal environment. Coughing clears your breathing passages of thick mucus that can carry germs to the rest of your body. Children should be under a doctor's care, especially when medications are involved.
 - Gargle** four times a day to moisten a sore throat and bring temporary relief.
 - Hot or cold packs** can be placed around congested sinuses to provide relief.
 - Sleep with an extra pillow under your head.** This will help relieve congested nasal passages.

Good luck this flu season and try some of these preventative techniques to stay healthy!

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Date: _____

Meeting Conducted By: _____ Title: _____

Attendees

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2		25	
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