THE FLU

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What Is It?

Influenza (“flu”) is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. It usually sweeps through a community once a year infecting a large number of people within a short period of time.

How is it spread?

The flu virus lives in the nose and throat. Sneezing, nose blowing, kissing, coughing, sharing drinks and hand-to-hand contact spread the virus.

Some people carry the flu virus in their respiratory tract and never show symptoms; however, these people may spread the virus to others.

What are the symptoms?

Flu symptoms are similar to those of a common cold but are usually more severe. Symptoms often come on quickly. They include:
- fever > 100.4°F, chills
- headache, dizziness
- muscle and body aches
- sore throat
- dry cough

Rarely vomiting and diarrhea occur. Symptoms last 3-5 days.

What can you do?

Viruses do not respond to antibiotics. You must be prepared to let the flu run its course. There are a number of things you can do to feel better and help prevent spreading the infection.

- REST: This is no time to be jogging, playing sports or working. Your body needs its strength to fight the virus. Do not tire yourself unnecessarily.
- DRINK: Your body needs extra fluids when you have a fever. Provided you drink plenty of high-calorie fluids, solid foods are not necessary if you do not feel like eating. Fluids to consider include fruit juices, soups, gelatin and sodas. Avoid dairy products. For adults, increasing fluids means drinking enough to urinate every 3 hours.
- TAKE IBUPROFEN OR ACETAMINOPHEN every 6-8 hours. Follow label directions for dose instructions. This will help keep the fever down and minimize aches and pains.
- PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE: Wash your hands, cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough, and properly dispose of used facial tissues.

Consult health care personnel:
- if red rash appears on ankles (Emergency - see Student Health or ER immediately)
- if symptoms last longer than five days without improvement.
- if symptoms get worse or new ones appear (i.e. chest pain, shortness of breath, earache).
- anytime you are unsure of what to do.

A NOTE ABOUT VACCINATIONS

Students or other persons in institutional settings (e.g., those who reside in dormitories) should be encouraged to receive flu vaccine to minimize the disruption of routine activities during epidemics, and also to avoid spreading flu in the community and at home.

Any students with chronic illnesses (diabetes, cystic fibrosis, etc.) should also consult their health care provider about flu vaccinations.