



Cold and flu prevention



You know the symptoms — a runny nose, sneezing and a scratchy throat. Are you getting the dreaded cold? But what if you also have a fever, aches and chills? Then, you might have the flu. Whether it's a cold or the flu, getting sick is never fun. Wouldn't it be better if you could avoid a cold or the flu in the first place? You can take simple steps to decrease your chances of getting sick.

Prevention

While it's nearly impossible to completely avoid cold or flu viruses, prevention is simple. Here are some tips:¹

- **Clean shared surfaces.** Wipe down items like telephones, keyboards, steering wheels and doorknobs often.
- **Get the flu shot.** It's the best way to protect yourself from the flu.
- **Avoid close contact with those who are sick.** This will help to reduce the chance of getting infected and sick.

Washing your hands like a pro

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, handwashing is one of the most important ways to prevent the transmission of disease.² Wash your hands after touching someone who is ill or after touching an object a sick person has touched. Also, remember to keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth unless you've washed your hands.

Here are some guidelines on how to most effectively wash your hands:²

1. Use running water and soap to lather your hands and wrists. Scrub for at least 20 seconds.
2. Rinse with your hands pointing down so the rinse water doesn't run up your arms.
3. Dry with a clean towel or air dry them.
4. Shut off the faucet using the paper towel so you don't have to touch the handle.
5. Use a lotion or moisturizing cream to prevent cracks in the skin that can provide an entry point for germs and bacteria.



Sources:

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *CDC Says "Take 3" Actions To Fight The Flu* (accessed September 2014); cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Handwashing: Clean Hands Saves Lives* (accessed September 2014); cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html.

3 American Lung Association website: *Facts About the Common Cold* (accessed September 2014); lung.org.

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Vaccination: Who Should Do It, Who Should Not and Who Should Take Precautions* (accessed September 2014); cdc.gov/flu/protect/whoshouldvx.htm#flu-shot.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine* (accessed September 2014); cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm.



Treatment

You can combat much of the discomfort from colds and flu with over-the-counter medications. However, be sure that you know what ingredients are in all the drugs you're taking to avoid taking too much. Also, check with your doctor before taking any medication if you're pregnant, breastfeeding, on another prescription drug or being treated for an ongoing health condition. Antibiotics aren't effective in treating viral infections like a cold or the flu, although your doctor may prescribe them if you develop a secondary infection like sinusitis or pneumonia.³

If your symptoms last longer than 12 days or your condition gets worse, call your doctor right away.

Remember to get your flu shot!

The best way to protect yourself against the flu is to get vaccinated each year. Vaccine experts now recommend that everyone six months and older get a flu shot. This is especially important if you live with or care for people at high risk for developing the flu, such as children younger than five, those who are 50 years of age or older and those with certain chronic medical conditions.⁴ The flu shot is given with a needle and approved for people older than six months, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions.

Children younger than six months of age and those with severe, life-threatening allergies to the flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine should not get the flu shot.⁴ You should talk to your doctor before getting the flu shot if you:⁴

- Have an allergy to eggs or any of the ingredients in the vaccine.
- Ever had Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS).
- Are not feeling well. You should talk to your doctor about your symptoms.

Yearly flu vaccinations should begin as soon as the vaccine is available.⁵ You can find out when the flu vaccine is available in your area at flu.gov under the Prevention and Vaccination tab.

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