

# The Flu

## *What college students need to know*

### **Q. What is influenza (aka flu)?**

**A.** The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, but most otherwise healthy people recover fully within seven to ten days. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

### **Q. What are symptoms of the flu?**

**A.** People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- A 100°F fever or higher
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)

### **Q. How does the flu spread?**

**A.** The flu spreads most easily among people who live, work, and play near other people, such as in residence halls, classrooms, and crowded social settings.

Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. A person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or possibly their nose.

### **Q. Can the flu be prevented?**

**A. Yes.** The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine. The CDC recommends that everyone six months and older should get a flu vaccine each year. The flu shot isn't only about protecting you. It's also about protecting others around you who may be more susceptible to serious complications. They could even be sitting next to you in class. So do your part and get a flu shot. You'll keep yourself and others healthier.

UW students can receive a flu shot from UHS at no cost. Call 608-265-5600 to make an appointment. UW employees should contact their health care provider.

### **Q. How long is it contagious?**

**A.** You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick.

### **Q. What medicines are available to treat it?**

**A.** Because viruses cannot be destroyed by antibiotics, treatment with antibiotic medication is ineffective in the treatment of the flu. Antiviral therapy is available, but due to its limited effectiveness in healthy young people and side effects with the medication, routine treatment is not recommended by the CDC.

### **Q. Is the stomach flu really the flu?**

Many people use "stomach flu" to describe an illness with nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Many different viruses, bacteria, or parasites can cause these symptoms.

The seasonal flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease. It rarely causes nausea, vomiting or diarrhea in adults.

## The Flu *(continued)*

### Q. What do I do if I think I have the flu?

**A.** If you have flu-like symptoms, there is very little you can do but stay home from school and work to give your body the rest it needs (and to prevent spreading the flu to others!) Unfortunately, the flu is caused by viruses, so a doctor's visit for antibiotics won't help.

The most severe symptoms usually improve after two to five days, but may last up to a week. Coughing and fatigue may persist for several weeks. Most people are able to return to work and class after five to seven days.

- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- Monitor your temperature and keep your fever down with acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Drink tons of fluids (two to three liters per day)! Warm water and hot tea can help alleviate a dry cough.
- Remember, the flu and cold are viral infections, antibiotics will not help.
- If you have concerns about your symptoms, or are at high risk of complications, **call UHS at 608-265-5600.**

### Q. When should a person seek medical treatment?

**A.** The flu without complications can be managed by time and conservative treatment measures and does not require a visit to a clinician. Most otherwise healthy people recover fully within seven to ten days.

#### Contact your health care provider if:

- You develop flu-like symptoms and have asthma, diabetes, a weakened immune syndrome, are pregnant, or have other chronic lung, heart, blood, or neurologic diseases
- You are unable to drink fluids and are becoming dehydrated; have a persistent fever (102°F / 38.8°C, or higher) that does not respond to aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen; or experience difficulty breathing
- Your symptoms do not improve at all after a week, or if rare complications develop

### Q. What if my roommate has flu symptoms?

**A. In the dorms:** If your roommate needs self-isolation because they have an flu-like-illness, they will need to stay in the dorm room except to use the bathroom, seek health-care, or for an emergency until they no longer have a fever for at least 24 hours without using fever-reducing medications.

**In an apartment:** Try to give the sick person their own room. If there is more than one sick person, they can share the sick room if needed.

**In both cases:** Everyone should wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer prior to and after using shared bathroom facilities, and wipe surfaces with disinfectant cleaning wipes.

## Five ways to avoid getting sick and passing it to others



**GET YOUR  
FLU SHOT**



**WASH YOUR HANDS  
WITH SOAP AND  
WATER OFTEN**



**AVOID TOUCHING  
YOUR FACE WITH  
YOUR FINGERS**



**SNEEZE AND COUGH  
INTO YOUR ELBOW,  
NOT YOUR HANDS**



**IF YOU DO GET SICK,  
STAY HOME!**

Visit [www.uhs.wisc.edu/health-topics/flu/](http://www.uhs.wisc.edu/health-topics/flu/) for more flu information