

COURAGE TO CARE



A HEALTH PROMOTION CAMPAIGN FROM
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FLU SEASON: A TEACHABLE MOMENT

We hope this fact sheet, and the attached fact sheet for patients will enhance your communication with service members and their families during the flu season.

Flu season is a time of concern for the health of individuals and families. Patients should be reminded when to contact your office if the flu vaccine is not available at the time of their visit. Lengthened deployments cause stress for many military families, especially those with young children. Single parents may be facing health experiences for the first time and need your reassurance.



Addressing your patient's concerns about the flu provides a 'teachable moment' for educating patients, especially parents, about important health habits that can last a lifetime.

Please share this fact sheet with your office staff, as they will surely encounter many questions addressed below. You can download the patient fact sheets as office takeaways, put them on your website, or email to providers in your network. Thank you for caring for our military and improving the health of our

Department of Defense community.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

What is the flu, and how does it differ from the common cold?

The flu is a contagious respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. It can cause mild to severe illness, and in some instances result in death. The flu is different from the common cold in that people with colds rarely get fevers, headaches or experience extreme exhaustion, which are symptoms of the flu.

How does the flu spread, and how long are you contagious?

The flu is spread through coughing, sneezing, even touching. You can get the flu from the cough or sneeze of someone who has it, or by touching a surface with virus-containing droplets that someone with the flu has touched (such as a door knob, stair railing or telephone) and then putting that finger or hand in contact with your nose, mouth or eyes.

Important Advice to Your Office Staff

Don't forget about your health and the health of your staff!

- Remind office staff to wash their hands frequently (especially between patients); disinfect surfaces, have tissues and handiwipes available for themselves and in waiting areas.
- Take care of yourself as well!

People with the flu are contagious *one day before* their symptoms start and for up to 7 days *after symptoms appear*.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

The flu starts suddenly and may include some of the following:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (diarrhea, vomiting, nausea); these are more common in children than in adults.

Symptoms last for a few days, but coughing and fatigue can last up to two weeks. Children may also get sinus infections and ear infections. Fevers usually begin to go down on the 2nd or 3rd day.

How Can We Prevent the Flu?

Here are some ways for avoiding the flu, which are good health habits to teach your children.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and don't expose others to you or your family if sick.

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- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based handi wipes to protect from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread when you touch something with germs and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

What Should We Do If We Get Sick?

- Get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids, and adults should avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- Practice the Golden Rule: Do unto others, as you would have others do unto you, which means:
 - Stay home from work when you are sick as it puts others at risk, as well as yourself and slows your recovery.
 - Keep children with the flu at home with childcare. Be familiar with your school district's rules on returning a child to school after the flu.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing or sneezing. This will help

keep others from being exposed to germs and getting sick. Be sure to throw away the tissues immediately after use.

FLU DIAGNOSIS AND MEDICATIONS: Q & A

Q: Is there a test to confirm the diagnosis of the flu?

A: Yes. There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long as you are tested within the first 2 or 3 days of illness.

Q: Are there medications to take if I get the flu?

A: Yes, there are four antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, zanamavir, and oseltamivir) approved for treatment of the flu. These require a doctor's prescription. Antiviral treatment lasts for 5 days and must be started within 2 days of illness so if you get flu-like symptoms, contact the office immediately.

Remind patients when taking medications to "Take only as directed." Some patients might think "if a little is good, more is better."

Important Advice to Adult Patients

Emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

There are antiviral medications approved for treatment of the flu that require a prescription. Consult with a doctor first.

Do not give aspirin to children and adolescents who have the flu as some are at risk for Reye's syndrome, a serious disorder that affects the nerves.

COURAGE TO CARE is a new health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University. Its purpose is two-fold: to provide quality health information reflecting our University's excellence in military medicine and to present it in a friendly, appealing format for immediate distribution for the health promotion needs in your community.

