

Student Health Centre

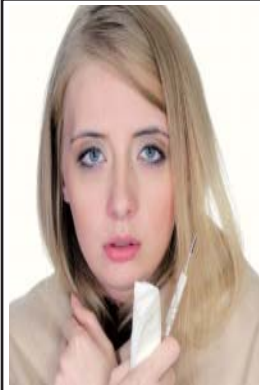
Seasonal Flu



Introduction

Seasonal flu (also known as influenza) is a highly infectious illness caused by a flu virus. The virus infects your lungs and upper airways, causing a sudden high temperature and general aches and pains. You could also lose your appetite, feel nauseous and have a dry cough. You may need to stay in bed until your symptoms get better.

Symptoms



Symptoms of Seasonal flu

Seasonal flu can give you any of these symptoms:

sudden fever (a temperature of 38°C/100.4°F or above),
dry chesty cough - headache - tiredness - chills - aching muscles - limb or joint pain
diarrhoea or stomach upset - sore throat - runny or blocked nose - sneezing - loss of appetite - Difficulty sleeping

Your symptoms will usually peak after two to three days and you should begin to feel much better within five to eight days. A cough and general tiredness may last for two to three weeks.



How it is spread?

The flu virus is spread in the small droplets of saliva coughed or sneezed into the air by an infected person. If you breathe in these droplets, you may become infected. Flu can also spread if someone with the virus touches common surfaces such as door handles with unwashed hands.

Flu or cold?

Many of the symptoms of flu are similar to those of the common cold, and many people incorrectly refer to a heavy cold as flu.

Symptoms of a cold appear gradually, are not severe and affect just your nose and throat. Symptoms of flu are more severe, causing fever and aching muscles. You will not be able to do your usual activities.

Diagnosing seasonal flu

Healthy people with seasonal flu do not need to contact their GP as they will get better on their own by taking over-the-counter flu remedies, resting, and drinking plenty of fluids.

When you should see your GP

See your GP if any of the following applies to you:

Your symptoms have got much worse, or you have developed other symptoms that are not typical of seasonal flu, such as a rash.

Your symptoms have lasted for longer than a week.

You have a medical condition that is making your flu worse.

Flu is usually diagnosed based on your symptoms, but your GP will also ask for your medical history.

Treating seasonal flu

If you are otherwise fit and healthy, you can manage your symptoms of seasonal flu at home (see below). You will usually get better without treatment.

If you are in an at-risk group

- people aged 65 and older,
- people with certain medical conditions (long-term heart, lung, kidney, liver or neurological disease, diabetes or those with a weakened immune system due to treatment or disease).

and have flu-like symptoms, or if your flu symptoms are getting worse, see your GP. These groups are more likely to suffer complications from flu.

Antibiotics are not prescribed for flu as they have no effect on viruses. However, occasionally it may be necessary to treat complications of flu, especially serious chest infections or pneumonia.

Caring for yourself at home

Make sure you have plenty of rest and are taking paracetamol-based cold remedies to lower your temperature and relieve symptoms. Drink plenty of fluids while you are recovering. You may need to stay in bed for two or three days after your symptoms peak.

Good hygiene

Preventing the spread of germs is the most effective way to slow the spread of flu. Always:

- ensure you wash your hands regularly with soap and water,
- clean surfaces regularly to get rid of germs,
- use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and
- put used tissues in a bin as soon as possible.