



Colds and Flu

Flu season

On average about 5,000 people in the UK die each year due to flu and this number rises in times of a flu epidemic. Flu and colds most commonly occur between December and March. Adults generally catch two to three colds each year, for children colds are even more common.

Cold and flu viruses are spread from person to person via droplets in the air. These droplets spread infection when sneezing or coughing. You can also catch an infection from touching infected surfaces or shaking somebody's hand.

Symptoms

Flu

The symptoms are similar to a common cold, including a runny nose and sore throat. Many people incorrectly refer to a heavy cold as flu. With flu you are likely to get a fever, loss of appetite, feel or be sick. Viruses cause them both, but flu affects the lungs much more than a cold does. Also flu doesn't usually give you the same congested heavy headed feeling that a cold does.

Colds

The symptoms of the cold are a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, sore throat and cough. The cold virus grows in the warm surfaces of your throat, nose, sinuses and airways. So that is where the symptoms generally occur.

You are at greater risk of having complications if you are elderly or if you have:

- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- HIV/AIDS or if you have had your spleen removed

Treatment

If you are usually fit and healthy, you can treat the symptoms of flu at home using remedies available from pharmacies. Antibiotics are not prescribed for flu as they have no effect on viruses. However, occasionally it may be necessary to control complications, especially serious chest infections or pneumonia. However, there are things you can do to help yourself feel better:

- Drink enough fluids
- Rest
- Don't inhale tobacco smoke
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Steam inhalations with menthol, eucalyptus or camomile
- Take painkillers that you would take for headaches to relieve the fever and pain

Complimentary medicines

Vitamin C, zinc and herbal remedy Echinacea are popular for preventing and treating colds.

Antiviral medicines

Antiviral medicine can reduce the duration of flu by around a day, but only if you start the treatment within the first two days of getting the flu.

Antibiotics can be used to treat other infections caused by bacteria, such as a chest infection or infections of the ear.

Prevention

There are a few steps that you can take to help prevent catching colds and flu:

- take regular exercise
- don't smoke
- eat a balanced diet that is rich in fruit and vegetables

To help prevent spreading a cold or flu:

- wash your hands regularly
- throw any tissues away as you have used them
- try to stay away from other people to prevent the virus from spreading

Why Immunise?

The flu jab will help protect you by significantly minimising your chance of catching the flu.

