Influenza

What is influenza?

- Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness in the nose, throat, and lungs. Rarely, the flu can result in hospitalization or death.
- Certain people are at greater risk for serious complications if they get the flu. This includes older people, young children, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease).

How do I know I have the flu and not a cold?

- You may have the flu if you have some of these symptoms: 
  - Abrupt onset of fever (above 100.5) with:
    - cough
    - sore throat
    - runny or stuffy nose
    - headache or body aches
    - fatigue

Should I be seen at the Student Health Center?

- Most people with the flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. The best thing you can do is follow the self care tips below.
- If you have the emergency warning signs of flu complications as found below, you should go to the emergency room.
- If you get sick with flu symptoms and are at high risk of flu complications or you are concerned, call Student Health at 802-656-3350. We can help determine if you need a medical evaluation here, need antiviral medication, or need emergency care.

How I get it?

- Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough and sneeze. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby.
- Sometimes, it can also be transmitted by touching surfaces (door knobs, faucets) that an infected person has touched and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes.

How can I prevent it?

- Get a flu shot! The flu vaccine is your #1 protection against flu. Even if you get a different version of the flu from what is in the vaccine, the vaccine may help you avoid serious complications if you do contract the flu.
- Wash your hands, OFTEN, and/or use hand sanitizer.

Self Care for the Flu

Flu symptoms can vary, and you may have some or all of the symptoms on the list above. Follow these guidelines to make yourself more comfortable:

**1. Fever, body aches and head aches:** Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) to reduce fever and muscle aches. If you are taking one of these drugs, ensure that you do not also take something like Nyquil which may contain additional doses of pain medication. (Don't take aspirin, as taking aspirin while you have the flu can cause dangerous side effects.) Monitor your temperature with a thermometer.

**2. Fatigue:** Sleep as much as you can and rest as long as you continue to feel tired.

**3. Cough:** Two types of over-the-counter cough syrups are useful for treating cough: an expectorant (which contains the ingredient guaifenesin) and a suppressant (which contains the ingredient dextromethorphan). Expectorants help you cough up mucus while suppressants stop constant coughing and might help you sleep. Follow the dosing instructions on the package and drink lots of water to help thin out the mucus in your chest.

**4. Sore throat:** Mentholated cough drops can help provide some relief. Gargle at least once each hour with 1 tsp (5 g) of salt dissolved in 8 fl oz (240 mL) of warm water.

**5. Stuffy nose:** A saline nasal spray can help moisturize and clean your nasal passages, and unlike a medicated nasal spray you can use it as often as you like. Sleeping with a humidifier may also help.

Learn more

For more info, check out the CDC website on influenza: http://www.cdc.gov/flu/faq/index.htm

When should I seek emergency care?

- You notice difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- You have severe pain or pressure in your chest or abdomen
- You feel dizzy or confused, or like you will pass out
- You have severe or persistent vomiting
- You have flu-like symptoms that improve, but then return with fever and worse cough