

Foster Care to Good Health

Feeling Sick?

Colds and the flu, mononucleosis, and strep throat – they can sweep through campuses and workplaces like wildfire. The best way to protect yourself is to eat a healthy diet, exercise and get enough sleep so that your body is strong enough to fight off these germs, but sometimes you just can't avoid them. **Here are some practical tips:**

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw the tissue in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough into your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based cleaners, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

Suppose you fall sick anyway. What do you have – a cold? The flu? Swine flu? Strep? Mono?

Colds are caused by any one or more of over 200 different viruses; influenza (the flu) is caused by a single family of viruses which can change its characteristics every year. **This year, swine flu (H1N1), a respiratory disease of pigs that has been passed on to humans, has caused illness and even death in some areas. A vaccine for swine flu is now available. Check with your school to see if you can get it through your health clinic. You can also Google "YOUR STATE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE" to find a community clinic or public health service office near you, where you can get the vaccination low-cost or free. Otherwise, the vaccination is available for a fee (approximately \$25) at Target and Walmart locations nationwide. To find a store near you, click here:**

Target: http://sites.target.com/site/en/spot/page.jsp?title=flu_search

Walmart: <http://flushotsusa.walmart.com/>

The vaccination is being recommended for all college students, and ESPECIALLY for pregnant women.

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So, how can you tell the difference between a cold and the flu or even swine flu? Cold symptoms start up gradually and last about a week, while the flu starts suddenly and dramatically and can last up to two weeks. **Swine flu shares characteristics with other influenza strains, although some people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting.**

This chart shows the symptoms that differentiate colds from the flu.

Cold and Flu Symptoms

Symptom	Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare	Common but not always; high (102-104°F); lasts 3-4 days
Headache	Rare	Almost always present
General aches and pains	Mild	Often severe
Fatigue, exhaustion, and weakness	Mild	Extreme exhaustion is early and severe. Fatigue and weakness can last two to three weeks
Stuffy nose	Nearly always	Sometimes
Sneezing	Very common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort and cough	Mild to moderate, hacking cough	Common, can be severe

Regardless of whether you have a cold or the flu, there isn't much you can do except rest, drink plenty of fluids especially if you have a fever, take aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) for the headache, muscle aches and fever, wait it out, and stay away from other people as much as possible.

However, if you have ANY of the following symptoms you should seek medical care immediately, whether you live in an area where swine flu has been identified or not:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen

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- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

If you have children, take them to the emergency room if they have any of these symptoms:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

There are several serious other illnesses which you might mistake for the flu.

Meningitis

Meningitis (meningococcal disease) is a potentially fatal bacterial infection. You can be vaccinated against it, and many schools require their incoming students to provide proof that they have been vaccinated. The Centers for Disease Control recommend that all college students be vaccinated. If you have not been vaccinated, or if you do not know, contact your school's health clinic.

The main symptom that differentiates meningitis from other much more common illnesses is the STIFF NECK – so if you have a stiff neck along with other flu-like symptoms, VISIT THE CLINIC OR SEE YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY.

Mononucleosis

Mononucleosis (mono or the “kissing disease”) feels like a cold that is NEVER going away. You have had cold or mild flu symptoms – fever, sore throat, headaches, fatigue and loss of appetite – for over a week and you JUST are not feeling any better. You might want to visit your clinic for a “Monospot” blood test.

Mono is treated the same way as a cold or flu – with rest, plenty of fluids, pain relievers/fever reducers, and time. Unfortunately, it can take up to a month or more for mono to run its course, and you may have to make special arrangements with your professors or even

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withdraw for the semester depending on the severity and timing of symptoms. There is one good thing about mononucleosis, though – if you have it once (documented by a doctor so you know you REALLY had it) – the virus remains in your body and you can't get it again.

Strep Throat

If you think you have a cold or the flu but your main symptom is a severe sore throat, you might have strep throat. Unlike the flu or a cold, strep throat is caused by bacteria – *streptococcus* – so the good news is that it can be treated IF it is diagnosed by a doctor.

If your throat is very sore for longer than 48 hours, or if it is beefy-red and swollen, you should see a doctor, who will probably do a rapid strep antigen test on a throat sample. This test is accurate with a positive result, but 10% to 20% of the time it can read a false negative. If your test is negative, the doctor may do a throat culture, where a sample is sent to the lab and the results are returned in 24 to 48 hours.

Strep throat is treated with a 10-day course of penicillin or erythromycin, and you will start to feel better within 24 to 36 hours of taking medicine. **It is very important that you finish the entire course of medication. In simplest terms, if you don't the remaining bacteria in your body may develop a resistance to the medicine, and the medication will be less effective the next time you use it.**

Intestinal Flu

Stomach flu is characterized by nausea, vomiting and diarrhea along with the same weakness and general sick feeling you get when you have the plain old ordinary flu or a cold. A stomach flu usually doesn't last longer than one to three days.

For nausea and vomiting

- Don't eat or drink anything for two to four hours, and then gradually introduce small amounts of water and other clear liquids such as flat 7-Up, jello or sport drinks.
- AVOID
 - Acidic drinks such as orange juice
 - Caffeinated beverages
 - Milk
- Drink only very small amounts of these liquids at a time – a sip or two – but take them every 10 minutes or so as long as you don't vomit.

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- If you do vomit after drinking, rest your stomach for another two to four hours and start again.
- Once you have not vomited for several hours and are able to drink clear liquids without nausea, you may eat something as well. Saltine crackers are a good first choice.
- ***If you have diarrhea only***, you do not need to restrict your diet. Take a medication like Imodium or Kaopectate according to the directions, but do not give such a medicine to a child. You can give a child as much Pedialyte as they want to prevent dehydration.

The major concern with stomach flu is dehydration, so if your symptoms last for longer than a day you should go to the clinic or see your doctor.

Well, we surely hope you stay healthy this winter. But if you don't, hopefully this advice will help you through it at the very least just because you'll know what you've got and how to treat it.