

# Stay ahead of the flu this winter



The autumn and winter are well known for chilly weather and a rise in illnesses such as the flu. Flu is a general term that refers to a group of viral illnesses that affect the nose, throat and chest. There are more than 10 different viruses that can cause flu symptoms. The most common ones being Influenza A, Influenza B, Rhinovirus, Adenovirus & Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).

The symptoms of flu can vary depending on the virus one has caught. The most common flu symptoms are:

- runny blocked nose
- headache
- sore throat
- cough
- body aches
- sneezing
- hoarse voice

These symptoms improve with time but for some people, they can last for up to 14 days. Flu can be easily managed at home but there are severe cases that may require hospital admission. Those who are very young, elderly or have other medical conditions are at risk for severe illness.

Most of the treatment of flu is supportive - aimed at relieving the symptoms while the body fights off the virus. Pain medication, decongestants, nose sprays, anti-histamines, cough syrups and vitamin C are commonly recommended. Anti-viral such as Tamiflu can also be given to help lessen the number of days that one is ill.



Flu is easily passed on from person to person. To limit the spread, the following measures can be taken:

- covering the nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing
- disposing of used tissues and handkerchiefs
- washing hands often with soap and water or hand sanitiser
- staying away from other people when one is unwell



**Because there are a variety of flu causing viruses, it is not uncommon to be ill more than once in a season.**

The flu vaccine has been readily available since 1945. It works by causing the body to create its own antibodies against some of the flu viruses. Getting the flu vaccine can lessen the severity of flu symptoms and it can also decrease the chances of needing to be admitted to hospital for severe flu illness. Of all the viruses that can cause flu symptoms the vaccine gives cover for four different strains.

Flu is a very common illness that everyone has had at some point in their lives. It is beneficial to exercise caution and to notice the signs of illness early.

