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## **Caring for Adults and General Advice**

Most people sick with the flu can be adequately cared for at home. It is essential only people with severe symptoms seek medical attention, to leave medical staff free to deal with those most in need.

Common symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever above 38 degrees Celsius
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Painful muscles
- Cough/runny nose/sore throat

In most cases people will start to feel better after about three days. If you are caring for someone at home who is sick with the flu, it is useful to do the following:

- Give regular fever-reducing medication, such as Paracetamol
- Provide cool fluids regularly. People with a fever dehydrate easily
- Ensure person covers mouth when coughing/sneezing
- Ensure plentiful supply of paper tissues for nose blowing, and a lined bin for immediate disposal
- Sick person should not share the bedroom with anyone else
- Ensure any utensils, cups etc used by the sick person are cleaned thoroughly
- Clean surfaces of the room, such as area around the bed and door handles, with bleach dilution (1 part bleach to 4 parts water)
- Wash person with lukewarm water, while keeping the bedding dry and not letting the person get cold
- Change bedding if it gets wet with sweat
- Keep mouth and lips moist with fluids and lip-balm. Provide ice cubes to suck
- If person finds breathing difficult, try sitting them up in bed. Keep the room well ventilated but not drafty
- When person starts to feel better, provide light foods such as soup and fruit

### **When temperature is high:**

Lower a fever if the person is uncomfortable, vomiting, dehydrated (person is thirsty and skin is hot and dry), or having difficulty sleeping. The goal is to lower, not eliminate, the fever.

- Give plenty of cool water to drink, or ice to suck.
- Remove excess clothing or blankets. The environment should be comfortably cool. For example, one layer of lightweight clothing, and one lightweight blanket to sleep.
- Keep the room well ventilated and cool.

A lukewarm bath, shower or sponge bath may temporarily help cool someone with a fever. This is more effective if carried out in conjunction with medication to reduce fever - i.e. Paracetamol or ibuprofen - otherwise the temperature can quickly go back up again.

#### **DO NOT:**

- **Do not** bundle up someone who feels chilled.
- **Do not** use cold baths or alcohol rubs. These cool the skin, but often make the situation worse by causing shivering, which raises the body temperature.
- **Do not** use aspirin in children under 14 years with fever.
- **Do not** persist with tepid sponging if it causes a child to become upset. It is better just to use Paracetamol or another fever lowering medication as recommended by your health care provider.

Try to keep other members of your family away from the sick person, to limit spread of the virus. Whenever you have had physical contact with the sick person, wash your hands well – use soap and warm water, and paper towels for drying your hands.

### **Caring for Children and Babies**

Older children and teenagers have the same symptoms as adults. **Very young children and infants probably have similar symptoms but they:**

- May not be able how to tell you how they feel - sore muscles or a headache
- May eat poorly and be irritable
- May develop a hoarse cry and barking cough (similar to croup).

#### **Younger children, especially those under six months:**

- May also have diarrhoea, vomiting – which will make them dehydrate very quickly - and stomach pain.

#### **Some things you can do to care for your child are:**

- **Give panadol or ibuprofen.** Every four to six hours (for ibuprofen) for fever in the dose recommended on the package (unless your doctor says otherwise). **Do not give medication containing aspirin.**
- **Offer cool fluids frequently.** This includes water, fruit juice, milk. With a fever, the body loses a lot of fluid, it is very important that this is continually replaced. If child is drowsy or not responding well **do not attempt to give fluids, seek medical or nursing advice immediately**
- **Dress child in light weight clothing.** They will probably have a high temperature and need to be kept cool (not cold)
- **Give a lukewarm bath or shower. Do not give cold baths or showers.** They can be unpleasant and distressing for the child, and does not successfully lower their temperature.
- **Care for them in a separate room away from other members of the household.** This reduces the risk of spreading the influenza virus to others.
- **Make sure the room has good ventilation.** Open windows (but not to create a draught) or keep air conditioning on which is well maintained.

- **Use salt water drops.** To treat a stuffy nose
- **Do not expect to be prescribed antibiotics for uncomplicated influenza.** They will have no benefit. Antibiotics will only be prescribed for complications of influenza such as pneumonia or an ear infection
- **Allow child to stay at home and rest until no longer infectious.** So that the virus is not spread to other children, you will be advised how long this time is during the pandemic. The infectious period could be a total of 14 days for school aged children and about 21 days for pre- school children

### **If you are a breastfeeding mother with influenza symptoms:**

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly before and after handling the baby
- Do not kiss the baby around the mouth or nose
- Do not breath directly onto the baby's face (use a mask if have some and know how to use then correctly)
- Keep anyone with influenza symptoms away from the baby

### **Dehydration**

**If you think you or someone you are caring for is dehydrated, you must seek medical advice. Phone the toll-free Health Line on 0800 611 116 or your medical centre.**

When someone is drinking very little, the signs of dehydration can be one or all of the following:

- Skin dry to touch and has lost its elasticity
- Passing dark yellow urine
- Passing very little or no urine
- Confusion/drowsiness
- Dull eyes

### **If any of the following symptoms appear you will need to ring your doctor for advice:**

- Decreased consciousness/confusion, are extremely drowsy and difficult to wake
- Severe dehydration (not drinking, passing very little urine)
- High fever not responding to fever reducing medication
- Difficulty breathing (become increasingly short of breath, find it painful to breath or are wheezing)
- Coughing up bloody or green sputum
- Severe pain in ears
- Had started to feel better, then high fever returning
- Have been unwell for three or four days and are not getting any better

**People who have the following pre-existing conditions, and develop flu symptoms, should call their doctor for advice:**

- Heart or lung disease
- 65 years or over with generally poor health

- Have a weak immune system due to any treatment or illness