

October 2004

Fight the Flu!

Shorter days and colder weather are signs that winter is fast approaching, heralding the peak period for outbreaks of influenza. While there are no miraculous cures for 'flu and other winter ills, you can keep yourself fighting fit and ready to win the cold war with a healthy dose of good advice from your local pharmacist! That's the latest healthcare message this autumn from the NPA, which represents 11,000 pharmacies across the country.

During the winter months many people confuse a severe cold with a dose of 'flu. However the two illnesses are distinctly different – as anyone who has suffered the severity and misery of full-blown 'flu will remember all too well! 'Flu affects much of the body and has a sudden onset, whereas a cold comes on gradually and affects just the nose and throat. The NPA's 'flu fact-sheet gives you the lowdown on what to do if you fall victim to 'flu this winter.

FLU FACTS ...

Typical 'flu symptoms include:

- A high temperature during the first 24 hours, which continues for 3-5 days.
- Loss of appetite and general weakness.
- Severe headaches
- Chills, shivering attacks and sneezing
- Muscular aches and pains
- Dry, hacking cough, sore throat and runny nose
- Nausea and vomiting

Most people will recover from the main symptoms within 10-14 days, but some are so exhausted they find it hard to imagine feeling normal again – and a bad bout of 'flu can often leave you feeling tired, weak and depressed for weeks afterwards.

If you develop 'flu symptoms, you should:

- Go to bed immediately – not least because you'll be keeping your germs to yourself!
- Keep warm and stay in bed until your temperature has been normal for 48 hours.

- Drink plenty of liquids to make up for fluids lost in sweating.
- Try to eat. Light meals will help to keep your strength up.
- Get plenty of rest and stay off work until the symptoms have gone. If you try to 'soldier on' your 'flu symptoms will probably last longer.

Home help...

There is no cure for 'flu – and because it is caused by a virus, antibiotics are of no use, unless you develop a chest or ear infection as well. Instead of waiting for a doctor's appointment you should try treating the symptoms at home, with effective remedies from your local pharmacy.

'Flu medicines include:

- Regular doses of a painkiller – aspirin (recommended for people over the age of 16 only), paracetamol or ibuprofen – to lower your temperature, relieve your headache, reduce muscular aches and pains and make you feel more comfortable.
- Antiseptic lozenges soothe a sore throat by keeping it moist – some have an in-built anaesthetic to numb the pain.
- Decongestants narrow blood vessels in the nose – reducing stuffiness and inflammation.
- Cough suppressants ease a dry, hacking cough and can help you sleep at night. If your cough is producing phlegm, choose an expectorant cough medicine.
- All-in-one 'flu remedies are a convenient treatment – and are available as tablets, capsules, syrups and hot lemon drinks.

NPA Chief Executive, John D'Arcy, says "Your pharmacist is an expert on medicines and how they work – and will recommend the best product for your symptoms. Don't forget that many different cold and 'flu remedies contain paracetamol. So to avoid accidental overdose, always read the medicine label carefully and *never take more than one paracetamol-based remedy at one time*. If in doubt, check with the pharmacist. The good news is that with your pharmacist's advice and recommended treatment, you'll probably recover from 'flu on your own. However, you should see your doctor if, your symptoms are severe or last longer than usual, you become suddenly short of breath or you cough up blood or yellow or green phlegm."

Get shot of the 'flu

For some people, 'flu can be fatal. So every autumn a 'flu vaccination is available on the NHS to protect those vulnerable groups at risk of developing complications. It provides short-term protection against the types of 'flu expected to be around that winter. As the 'flu virus changes every year, it is important to have the vaccine every autumn.

High risk groups include:

- The elderly
- People who have diabetes, heart conditions, lung or kidney disease
- People whose immune systems have been weakened by disease or treatments.
- People who live in nursing, residential or long stay homes

So if you fall foul of 'flu this winter , or want to know more about the 'flu jab, remember that help is as close as your nearest pharmacist.

Ask Your Pharmacist – You'll be taking good advice !

Notes to editors

1. The National Pharmaceutical Association (NPA) is the trade association that represents the professional and commercial interests of the owners of around 11,000 community pharmacies in the United Kingdom.
2. If you would like to arrange a media interview with a pharmacist local to your area, please contact the Press Office on 01727 858687 Exts 3265, 3227 or 3311. Alternatively, you can e-mail us at press.office@npa.co.uk.
www.askyourpharmacist.co.uk
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