Cold and Flu Season is Here:  
Tips for Staying Healthy  
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Cold and flu season is upon us. It’s important to recognize the symptoms to recognize the differences for most effective treatment.

Cold symptoms usually come on gradually beginning with a sore throat followed by nasal symptoms, runny nose, congestion and cough. A slight fever is possible. Symptoms last for about a week, and during the first three days you are contagious. Rest is the best way to treat a cold. Staying well hydrated also helps. Over-the-counter supplements such as daily vitamin C (500 mg a day) may shorten the duration of a cold and over the counter (OTC) cold and cough medications can help relieve symptoms.

Flu symptoms are more severe than cold symptoms and come on quickly. They include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

Both colds and flu are caused by viruses that enter your body through mucuous membranes such as the nose, eyes or mouth. Flu symptoms often mimic cold symptoms, with the most common difference being a higher temperature, usually in the 100-102 degree Fahrenheit range.

*Prevention and good habits are key.*

*Your hands carry germs.*  
The best way to prevent colds and flu is frequent hand washing with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds to help remove germs from the skin. If soap is not readily available, hand sanitizer can be effective in reducing the incidence of upper respiratory illnesses. Don’t touch your eyes, mouth or nose with your hands without scrubbing your hands first with soap. Encourage others to do so.  
**This is the best way to prevent the cold or flu virus from entering your body in**
the first place. Wipe down germy areas on surfaces and objects you touch in your office, home and school. Don’t forget light switches, doorknobs, your phone, computer and TV remote.

A strong body is a strong defense. Keeping your body strong to fend off germs and viruses is key. Eat healthy foods such as low-fat proteins, fruits and vegetables with plenty of nutrients. Stay hydrated by drinking a lot of fluids such as water to boost your immune response, and exercise to strengthen immunity. Vitamin C supplementation (500 mg/day) may help prevent getting sick from viruses and may help shorten the duration of a viral illness.

Seasonal flu activity generally peaks between late December and early March. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges action to protect yourself and others from influenza (the flu) which is a serious contagious disease that can lead to hospitalization and even death. Specifically for flu prevention, the following tips are recommended:

Get a flu vaccine.
An annual flu vaccine is recommended for all individuals over the age of six months to protect against the viruses that research suggests will be most common this season. There are two important updates to the CDC guidelines for the 2016-17 season that were recently announced: 1.) abandoning the intranasal formulation of the vaccine because it was found to be substantially less effective than the injectable formulation; 2.) egg-allergic individuals whose reactions have been limited to hives may receive the vaccine in the same manner as the general population. Those who have had more severe reactions (including anaphylaxis requiring epinephrine or other emergency intervention) may also receive the vaccine but administration should occur in an inpatient or outpatient setting where a healthcare provider can monitor and treat the individual for a reaction, if necessary.

Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctor visits, and missed work and school due to flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations.
Vaccination of high risk people is especially important to decrease their risk of severe flu illness. Those at high risk of serious flu complications include young children, pregnant women, people with certain chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease, and people 65 years of age and older. Vaccination is also important for health care workers and other people who live with or care for high risk people to keep from spreading flu to them.

**Take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs.**

In addition to washing hands with soap and water, avoid close contact with sick people, and stay home while sick. If you are experiencing flu symptoms, the CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.

Common sense, everyday preventive measures include covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that you may have also contaminated with your germs.

**Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor prescribes them.**

If you get the flu, antiviral drugs can be used to treat your illness. Antiviral drugs are different from antibiotics. They are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) and are not available over-the-counter. Antiviral drugs can make illness milder and shorten the time you are sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For people with high risk factors, treatment with an antiviral drug can mean the difference between having a milder illness versus a very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay. Studies show that flu antiviral drugs work best for treatment when they are started within two days of getting sick, but starting them later can still be helpful, especially if you are a high risk factor or are very sick from the flu.

Sources: cdc.gov/flu; medical-economics.modernmedicine.com; webmd.com
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