

Medications to Help Lessen Symptoms of the Flu - Guidance for the Public During the 2009 - 2010 Influenza Season

September 1, 2009

What is an “influenza-like illness”?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines an **influenza-like-illness (ILI)** as having:

- fever with a temperature of 100°F (37.8°C) or greater AND
- a cough and/or a sore throat
- no other KNOWN cause of the above symptoms

Talk to your healthcare provider

Most people recover fully from the flu (influenza) without complications. However, people at high risk of flu complications include those who are pregnant, have asthma or diabetes, have compromised immune systems, or have neuromuscular diseases.

- **People with influenza-like illness who are at high risk of flu complications** should speak with their health care provider as soon as possible.
- **People with influenza-like illness who are taking medications not related to the flu** (either prescription or over-the-counter) should check with their healthcare provider or pharmacist before adding any medications to help lessen symptoms of the flu.

When to Seek Emergency Medical Care

Get medical care right away if you:

- have difficulty breathing or are having chest pain
- have purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- are vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- have signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, or lack of urination (or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry)
- have seizures or convulsions
- are becoming confused

Antiviral medications

Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and make you feel better faster. **Most people do not need antiviral medications to fully recover from the flu.**

Antiviral medicines may also prevent serious flu complications. This fall, antivirals may be prioritized for persons with severe illness or those at higher risk for flu complications. **People with influenza-like illness who are at higher risk for severe flu complications, or those with severe flu illness who require hospitalization, might benefit from treatment with antiviral medications.** Antiviral medications are available for persons 1 year of age and older. Ask your health care provider whether you need antiviral medication.

Antibiotics

Influenza infections can lead to or occur with bacterial infections. Therefore, some people will also need to take antibiotics. Illness that is more severe or prolonged or illness that seems to get better, but then gets worse again may be an indication that a person has a bacterial infection. Check with your health care provider if you have concerns.

Fever-reducing medications

Fevers and aches can be treated with acetaminophen (for example, Tylenol®) or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (for example Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®) or, naproxyn (for example Aleve®).

Warning! Do NOT give aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) **to children or teenagers who have the flu**; because this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome. Check ingredient labels on over-the-counter cold and flu medications to see if they contain aspirin. Children and teenagers with the flu can take medicines **without** aspirin, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®), to relieve symptoms.

Over- the-counter cold and flu medications

- Over-the-counter cold and flu medications used according to the package instructions may help lessen some symptoms such as cough and congestion. Importantly, these medications will not lessen how infectious a person is.
 - Children younger than 4 years of age should **NOT** be given over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a health care provider.
 - For children younger than 2 years of age the safest care for flu symptoms is using a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.
- Check the ingredients on the package label to see if the medication already contains acetaminophen or ibuprofen before taking additional doses of these medications—don't double dose! Patients with kidney disease or stomach problems should check with their health care provider before taking any NSAIDs.
- Check with your health care provider or pharmacist if you are taking other over-the-counter or prescription medications not related to the flu.

For more information on the novel H1N1 influenza and seasonal influenza, please visit www.hcphe.org, www.cdc.gov, or www.flu.gov.