

AHRQ Safety Program for Telemedicine: Improving Antibiotic Use

Influenza – Patient Guide for Children and Adults

What is the flu?

- The influenza virus causes the flu.
- The flu can make you feel tired or run down and can give you a fever, sore throat, headache, runny or stuffy nose, cough, muscle aches, diarrhea, and vomiting.
- The flu virus spreads from person to person through respiratory droplets, which you make when coughing, spitting, sneezing, or sometimes speaking forcefully.
- After you are exposed to the flu virus, it usually takes about two days to start feeling sick.
- You can spread the flu to others for about a week after you start feeling sick.
- You can limit the chance of spreading the flu by:
 - Washing your hands often with soap/water or hand sanitizer.
 - Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your elbow.
 - Wearing a mask when you are sick and around other people.
 - Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
 - Staying home from work, school, or daycare, if feasible.
- Getting a flu vaccine (also called a flu shot) every year is the best way to prevent the flu. You can sometimes still get the flu even if you get the flu shot, but your illness will be less severe.



What should I do to feel better?

- You can take antiviral medicines to treat the flu. These work best if taken within 48 hours (or two days after you begin to feel sick).
- Ask your healthcare provider what to do. They may tell you to:
 - Take ibuprofen (commonly called Advil® or Motrin®) or acetaminophen (commonly called Tylenol®); store brands (e.g., CVS brand) are just as good as name brands (e.g., Motrin).
 - Get plenty of rest, drink lots of water or other liquids, and avoid smoking.
 - To help a sore throat, gargle with warm water, take cough drops (generally wait until a child is at least 6 years old), take about ½ a teaspoon to 1 teaspoon of honey every 2 hours or so (do not give honey to children under 1 year of age), and/or drink warm tea.

What is the role of antibiotics?

- Antibiotics do not help the flu. Antibiotics only kill bacteria, and bacteria do not cause the flu. If you use antibiotics to treat viruses, they won't make you feel better and they can do more harm than good. You will still feel sick, and the antibiotic may give you a skin rash, diarrhea, or a yeast infection.
 - Antibiotics should only be taken during the flu if your healthcare provider is concerned that you may also have a bacterial infection.

When will I feel better?

- Most people feel sick from the flu for a week or more.

Contact your healthcare provider immediately if:

- You do not feel better after 10 days.
- You develop a new fever, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion, and severe or persistent vomiting.

This document is intended to provide health-related information so that you may be better informed. It is not a substitute for your healthcare provider's medical advice and should not be relied upon for treatment for specific medical conditions.



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