



Patient & Family Guide
2017

Cold & Flu Season: Taking Care While You're in the Hospital

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Saison de la grippe et du rhume (FF85-1552)



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Cold & Flu Season

What is the common cold?

The **common cold** is a respiratory viral illness and may affect the nose, throat and lungs.

The first signs of a cold are usually a sore throat and runny nose, followed by coughing and sneezing. Most people get better in about 7-10 days. Colds are most common in the winter and spring, but it is possible to get a cold any time of the year.

What is the flu?

The **flu**, or **influenza**, is also a respiratory viral illness and may affect the nose, throat and lungs. The flu is different from a cold.

The flu can cause mild to severe illness. It usually comes on suddenly. For most people, it can take several days or as long as two weeks to recover from the flu. Some people will develop complications that will add to recovery time, such as ear or sinus infections, bronchitis or pneumonia.

The flu is most common between November and April.

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

Is it a cold or the flu?

Symptom	Cold	Flu
Fever	Uncommon (usually less than 38.5 °C /101 °F)	Common (high fever 38.5-40.0 °C /102-104 °F may last 3-4 days)
Runny nose	Common	Sometimes
Headache	Sometimes	Common (can be severe)
General aches and pains	Sometimes	Common (can be severe)
Fatigue (tiredness, weakness)	Mild	May last up to 2-3 weeks
Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)	Uncommon	Common
Lack of appetite (not feeling hungry)	Sometimes	Common
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate	Common (often severe)
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Watery eyes	Common	Sometimes
Complications:	Sinusitis, ear infections	Sinusitis, ear infections, bronchitis, pneumonia

How do colds and the flu spread?

Respiratory illnesses can spread easily from person to person by coughing or sneezing. They can also spread by wiping your nose, mouth or eyes after touching a surface with a virus on it, or shaking a person's hand.

People infected with the flu may be able to infect others from the day before they have symptoms and up to 5-7 days after symptoms start. Children and people with weakened immune systems can be contagious (able to infect others) for more than 7 days.

How can I protect myself and others from getting the flu?

- Get your flu shot every year from your health care provider.
- Eat healthy foods and stay active to keep your immune system strong.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, especially before touching your face, before eating, and after using the bathroom.
- Keep your hands away from your face (especially your eyes, nose and mouth).
- Cough or sneeze into your arm, not your hand. If you use a tissue, throw it away as soon as you use it, and then wash your hands.

- Stay away from people who are sick.
- If you get sick, stay home until your symptoms are gone.
- Keep common surface areas like light switches, telephones, door handles clean and germ-free.
- Help children and dependent individuals with washing or sanitizing their hands.

What should I do if I get the flu?

It is important to stay home while you are sick. Rest and drink plenty of fluids. Your pharmacist or doctor may recommend taking medicine such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen to lessen your fever and body aches. Wash your hands often to avoid spreading the virus to others.

Contact your family doctor if your symptoms get worse. **Get medical attention right away** if you have:

- › Shortness of breath
- › Chest pain
- › Bloody or coloured mucus (spit)
- › Severe pain in your head or face
- › High fever (38.5-40.0°C or 102-104°F) lasting more than 3 days

Do not visit the hospital while you are sick unless you are going to get medical care for yourself. Tell the person at the registration area if you have any symptoms. You may be asked to wear a mask while waiting.

Are there medicines to treat the flu?

Your doctor may order antiviral medication for you. **These medications are not usually needed for healthy people who get the flu.** They may be needed by those who are very ill (hospitalized), or those at risk of complications (with chronic medical conditions or residents of long term care facilities).

These medications do not replace getting a yearly flu shot. Getting your flu shot is the best way to help prevent flu and its complications.

What happens in the hospital?

If you are admitted to the hospital for your cold or flu symptoms, the doctor may order a swab of your nose to test for respiratory viruses.

If you have cold or flu-like symptoms, your health care providers may take extra care and use ‘Droplet and Contact Precautions’. This means staff will wear gloves, a gown and a mask with a face shield when caring for you. This decreases the chance of spreading the virus to other patients, residents, staff and visitors.

Your family and visitors will be asked to follow the same safety measures if they are providing direct care to you. They should not visit other patients after they visit you until the extra precautions have been removed.

Remember:

- Washing your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub is the best way to stop the spread of infections in hospitals.
- Get your flu shot every year from your health care provider.

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.