



## Flu Like Illness

Classical influenza (flu) is caused by the influenza virus. However, many other virus germs can cause illnesses very similar to flu. Often it is impossible for doctors to say exactly which virus is responsible and will make a diagnosis of a 'flu like illness'.

### What are the symptoms?

A bunged up runny nose is usually not a feature of flu. Many people will say they have flu, when in fact they only have a heavy cold. Typical symptoms of flu are as follows:

A high temperature, sweats, muscle aching all over, a dry cough, generalised lethargy and headache. Symptoms often develop quickly. Even in fit young people it sometimes puts them to bed. Usually symptoms peak after 1-2 days, and then gradually wear off over another 1-2 days. A feeling of lethargy (tiredness) may persist for several days or even for a week or so after the illness.

### Treatment

Virus infections are normally self limiting. This means the body's immune system normally fights them off. Antibiotics do not kill viruses and treatments are aimed at helping with the symptoms:

- ◆ Take paracetamol regularly. Take the maximum dose 4 times a day. This will help bring the temperature down and ease aching muscles and headaches.
- ◆ Drink plenty of fluid. Mild dehydration may develop if there is a high temperature. This can make the headache and general feeling of tiredness much worse.
- ◆ Do not wrap up, but try and cool down.

### Complications

If a person was previously well, complications are unusual. However, people who have bad chests or were previously ill or frail may be prone to chest infections. Secondary chest infections by bacteria would then be treated with antibiotics.

### Epidemics and vaccination

Flu like illnesses are due to a variety of viruses and are common all the year round. However, the influenza virus often causes an epidemic in the British Isles each winter. The influenza virus is more likely to cause complications than other viruses and can sometimes sweep through the country infecting many people. Efforts are made each autumn to immunise those people most at risk of developing complications if they catch the influenza virus. The following groups should get their 'flu jab' each autumn. Those with: asthma, other chronic lung diseases, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes and elderly people.

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