

Otterbein University

Student Health Center

INFLUENZA or "The FLU"

What is it?

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times lead to death.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms start suddenly with a fever (>100.5), weakness and fatigue, dry cough, headache and body aches. Other flu symptoms may include sore eyes, runny nose, sore throat, sneezing, congestion and burning chest pain. Infrequently, vomiting and diarrhea may occur.

Symptoms are most severe for the first 2-3 days of the illness, and it may take 5-10 days to resolve.

How is it spread?

The flu virus lives in the nose and throat. Coughing, sneezing, nose blowing, kissing, sharing drinks and hand-to-hand contact spread the virus. Flu symptoms usually start 1-3 days after exposure to the virus.

What can you do?

Prevention is the best, practice **good hand-washing!** Get a flu shot every year. Once an outbreak hits campus, it is still not too late to be vaccinated, though it takes 2 weeks to achieve maximum protection. Other ways to protect yourself include: avoid close contact, stay home when you are sick, cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, wash your hands often, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Antibiotics are not effective against the virus; however, there are certain anti-viral medications (available by prescription only) that can help lessen the severity of flu symptoms and shorten the course of the illness by a few days. To be effective, the anti-viral medication must be started within the first 2 days of symptom onset. Also, these medications may be used to prevent the flu if you have been exposed through a roommate, family member, or close contact with a flu victim.

REST at least 24-48 hours after your temperature returns to normal. Do not go to class or social events.

DRINK FLUIDS such as water, juice, tea, soup, Jell-O, Gatorade, or soda. Hot drinks may help break up congestion. Avoid caffeinated drinks (may be dehydrating) and milk (may increase congestion).

MEDICATION for fever, aches and pains: Ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil) with food, 200mg, 2 tablets every 4-6 hours **OR** Acetaminophen (Tylenol), 325mg, 2 tablets every 4-6 hours. **DO NOT TAKE ASPIRIN.**

Contraindications to taking Ibuprofen include allergies to aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS), asthma, peptic ulcer disease or history of GI bleeding, and chronic renal disease.