Influenza

The word "flu" describes a family of viral infections that attacks millions of us each year. Escape is almost impossible, since influenza viruses are constantly changing and adapting. Immunization (also called a flu shot) protects against only a few specific types, and no one is immune to all strains of viruses.

For most of us, the respiratory and gastro-intestinal symptoms are relatively mild and can be controlled, although the resulting condition is often best termed "wretched." However, infants, the elderly, and those weakened by other conditions and diseases, are in serious danger from flu, and many in those groups die each year from the flu.

Please note the following common-sense recommendations for protecting yourself from getting the flu:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after shaking hands with people; carry a container of waterless anti-bacterial soap with you
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Drink lots of liquids and eat nutritiously
- Get plenty of sleep

Prevention

To limit the debilitating effects of flu, follow the instructions below. Keep in mind that the risk of flu is always high in a university environment where contact with so many different people is inevitable. Protect yourself, as well as doing your part to avoid spreading the disease.

Your overall best defense is to keep your body strong. By eating well and getting plenty of rest, your body will be better able to fight off the influenza virus before you develop symptoms.

Consider getting immunized, as vaccines protect against certain strains of influenza. Flu shots are available at the student health service.

Protect Others

If you think you have influenza (see Signs and Symptoms below), it is best to rest at home and to not expose others to your germs. Stay at home if you have a fever greater than 100°F. If you are going to miss class due to influenza, call or e-mail your professors in advance of your class and let them know why you will be absent.

Signs and Symptoms

Seventy-five percent of people with influenza develop symptoms rapidly, usually within one to four days after exposure. The early symptoms begin suddenly with recurring high fever, brief shaking chills, headache, pain behind the eyes, non-productive hacking cough, fatigue, and severe joint and muscle aches. Most cases of symptomatic flu are mild and last only a few days, but full recovery can take two to four weeks.

While weakened by the flu, you are more susceptible to develop viral or bacterial pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus trouble, or ear infections. Frequently, these secondary infections are more severe than the original flu and may require treatment.

If your need is urgent, and the student health service is closed, go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call 911 for an ambulance.

Treatment

There is little your health care provider can do to speed your recovery. Viruses Do Not Respond to Antibiotics! However, there are a number of things that you can do to speed your recovery.

- Rest. You do not have to stay in bed, but you should limit your activity as much as possible. Your body can use the energy normally used for physical activity to fight the infection.
• **Drink Lots of Fluids.** It is unnecessary to eat if you have no appetite, but you should drink fluids to help control the fever and reduce aches and pains.

• **Take acetaminophen (such as Tylenol), ibuprofen (such as Advil or Motrin), or naproxen (such as Aleve)** which are available over-the-counter. They can relieve muscle aches and fever. Follow the recommended dosage on the package. You should not take aspirin.

• **Oral decongestants (such as Sudafed)** may relieve excessive nasal discharge and stuffiness. Preparations without antihistamines are less likely to cause drowsiness. Decongestants make some people jittery, unable to sleep and may cause dry mouth.

• **Keeping a throat lozenge, cough drop, or hard candy** in your mouth will stimulate your saliva and help soothe your throat. **Take Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen**, which are available over-the-counter. They can relieve muscle aches and fever. Do NOT use Aspirin!

• **Run a Humidifier or Vaporizer** to help relieve dry, hacking cough. If you don't have a vaporizer, run a hot shower and breathe the moist air. Pots filled with water or wet towels hung in a room will help to produce the same humidifying effect.

• **Limit or Discontinue Smoking.** Smoking irritates the lining of the respiratory tract, thus lowering the resistance to complications.

• **Practice Good Hygiene.** To help prevent the spread of the virus, wash your hands frequently, cover your nose and mouth when sneezing, properly dispose of facial tissues, and do not share items like toothbrushes and drinking containers.