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10 Flu Myths

Dispelling misinformation about the flu vaccine, sickness, treatment, and recovery

Updated: November 12, 2018 Published: November, 2009

If you've ever had the flu, you know how sick you can be. Chances are good that some of the advice friends and family gave you about avoiding or dealing with the flu was wrong. There seems to be no shortage of misinformation and bad advice when it comes to dealing with the flu and the flu shot.

Here are 10 common myths about the flu.

1. **MYTH: You can catch the flu from the vaccine.**

The flu shot is made from an inactivated virus that can't transmit infection. So people who get sick after receiving a flu vaccination were going to get sick anyway. It takes a week or two to get protection from the vaccine. But people assume that because they got sick after getting the vaccine, the flu shot caused their illness.



2. **MYTH: Healthy people don't need to be vaccinated.**

While it's especially important for people who have a chronic illness to get the flu shot, anyone — even healthy folks — can benefit from being vaccinated. Current CDC guidelines recommend yearly vaccination against influenza for everyone older than 6 months of age, including pregnant women.

3. **MYTH: Getting the flu vaccination is all you need to do to protect yourself from the flu.**

There are a number of [steps you can take to protect yourself](#) during flu season besides vaccination. Avoid contact with people who have the flu, wash your hands frequently, and consider taking anti-viral medications if you were exposed to the flu before being vaccinated.

4. **MYTH: The flu is just a bad cold.**

Influenza may cause bad cold symptoms, like sore throat, runny nose, sneezing, hoarseness, and [cough](#). But in the United States alone, 36,000 people die and more than 200,000 are hospitalized each year because of the flu. During the 2017/18 flu season, flu activity has significantly increased throughout the majority of the country with the A(H3N2) viruses predominating so far, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). A(H3N2) virus-predominant influenza seasons have been associated with more hospitalizations and deaths in people age 65 years and older as well as young children. It's not too late to get a flu shot. Even if it doesn't prevent you from getting the flu, it can decrease the chance of severe symptoms.

5. **MYTH: You can't spread the flu if you're feeling well.**

Actually, 20% to 30% of people carrying the influenza virus have no symptoms.

6. **MYTH: You don't need to get a flu shot every year.**

The influenza virus changes (mutates) each year. So getting vaccinated each year is important to make sure you have immunity to the strains most likely to cause an outbreak.

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7. **MYTH: You can catch the flu from going out in cold weather without a coat, with wet hair or by sitting near a drafty window.**

The only way to catch the flu is by being exposed to the influenza virus. Flu season coincides with the cold weather. So people often associate the flu with a cold, drafty environment. But, they are not related.

8. **MYTH: Feed a cold, starve a fever.**

If you have the flu (or a cold) and a fever, you need more fluids. There's little reason to increase or decrease how much you eat. Though you may have no appetite, "starving" yourself will accomplish little. And poor nutrition will not help you get better.

9. **MYTH: Chicken soup will speed your recovery from the flu.**

Hot liquids can soothe a sore throat and provide much needed fluids. But chicken soup has no other specific qualities that can help fight the flu.


10. **MYTH: If you have a high fever with the flu that lasts more than a day or two, antibiotics may be necessary.**

Antibiotics work well against bacteria, but they aren't effective for a viral infection like the flu. Then again, some people develop a bacterial infection as a complication of the flu, so it may be a good idea to get checked out [if your symptoms drag on or worsen](#).

The flu is a good example of how medical myths can get in the way of good medical care. When it's flu season, take the necessary steps to stay healthy. That includes separating fact from myth.

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