

CDC advice for those with flulike symptoms

May 1 2009, By Judith Graham

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is offering advice to people wondering what to do if a family member takes ill with flulike symptoms. Some of the more important points:

Q: How long should I stay home if I have [swine flu](#)?

A: The CDC says "stay home for seven days after the start of illness."

Q: What medications should I give my child with [flu symptoms](#)?

A: Don't give aspirin to children or teenagers who have the flu. The CDC notes "this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome." Double-check labels for all cold and flu medications to make sure they don't contain aspirin.

Don't give a child younger than 2 an over-the-counter cold medication without speaking first to a doctor or nurse. Safest for children in this age group is "using a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus" from the nose, the CDC says.

For older children, drugs such as Tylenol, Advil, Motrin, Nuprin and Aleve can be used to relieve symptoms but not to address the underlying infection. If you're using multiple medications, make sure you don't double-dose your child.

Q: When should I seek emergency care?

A: If the sick person has difficulty breathing, chest pain, purple or blue discoloration of the lips, seizures, is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down, has signs of dehydration (dizziness when standing, absence of urination, a lack of tears when infants cry), or becomes confused or less responsive.

Q: How can I prevent the spread of flu at home?

A: The CDC recommends that the sick person stay in a separate room, if possible, with the door closed. If the person needs to be in a common area of the house, he or she should wear a surgical mask. If possible, have only one adult take care of the sick person. Ask everyone at home to clean his or her hands regularly with soap and water. Have family members use paper towels for drying hands or a dedicated cloth towel for each person.

Q: What cleaning regimens are recommended?

A: Wash sheets and towels and dry on a hot setting. The CDC says "avoid 'hugging' laundry prior to washing to prevent contaminating yourself. Wash hands after handling dirty laundry. Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person and wash hands after. Regularly disinfect all surfaces, and clean eating utensils thoroughly.

Q: Should I be taking anti-viral medication if someone in my home is sick?

A: "Anti-virals can be used to prevent the flu, so check with your health-care provider" to see if you or other people in the household should take the medications, the CDC says.

Q: Will I need antibiotics?

A: Bacterial infections such as pneumonia or ear infections can accompany the flu and require treatment with antibiotics. Especially at risk are people with chronic illnesses. "More severe or prolonged illness that seems to get better but then gets worse again may be an indication that a person has a bacterial infection," the CDCO says. If you're concerned, call your doctor.

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Citation: CDC advice for those with flulike symptoms (2009, May 1) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-05-cdc-advice-flulike-symptoms.html>

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