

Colds and flu

Advice to patients

Colds and flu

The **cold** is a minor illness caused by a virus. It leads to the following symptoms: blocked and runny nose, sore throat and headache, cough and watery eyes.

It generally begins in the nose and the throat and then goes down to the bronchial tubes. After a few days it gets better without treatment.

Between two and five colds may be suffered a year, with young children getting them more often.

Flu is also an illness caused by a virus. It appears as an epidemic in the winter, coinciding with the coldest months. It begins suddenly, with a high fever (39° - 40° C), muscular pain, headache and sore throat, general poorliness, blocked nose and dry cough. It may cause diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting, especially in children.

Other viruses can cause the same symptoms.

You need to be patient and not expect to feel better straight away. You cannot keep up your normal rhythm of life. The fever caused by flu lasts from four to five days, and the cough and tiredness can last three weeks.



How can you prevent colds and flu?

Infection is passed on via hands and the air. If you have flu or live with someone who has it or who has a cold, follow this advice:

- You should all wash your hands often and use disposable tissues to wipe your nose; cover your mouth when you cough and your nose when you sneeze.
- Put the used tissues in a bag and tie it up.
- Air a room where someone has flu by opening the window several times a day.

There are no vaccines against colds. The flu vaccine prevents flu but not colds. The flu vaccine is effective for a year.



What should you do?

- Rest and look after your health. Drink water, juice, broth or herbal teas. If you are not hungry, you do not need to eat solid food.
- There is no medication to cure flu or colds, but there are some, such as paracetamol, which help to alleviate headaches, fever and other symptoms.
- Antibiotics do not cure either colds or flu.
- Smoking is inadvisable. This may be a good time to stop smoking for good.
- Take a bath or shower to soften the mucus. Administer physiological serum or salt water to your nose.
- Sugar-free sweets are good for a tickly throat. Avoid coughing and expectorating except for clearing mucus: when you cough you scratch your throat which worsens irritation and coughing.



- To breathe better at night and stop the throat becoming so dry and causing you to cough, you can put pieces of raw onion on your bedside table.
- In the case of flu, you are also advised to rest. If you need to miss work, contact your health centre to process the sick note.
- Above all, do not interrupt any habitual treatment when you have a cold or flu.

When should you consult a health professional?

You can get over colds and flu without any professional treatment. If in doubt, you can call our centre and consult the nursing or medical staff who usually deal with you.

Pharmacies are another place to ask questions about health.

You can consult your chemist or call the Sanitat Respon service on 902 111 444, where you will be given advice on curing flu and the common cold.

If necessary you can visit your health centre or pharmacy even if you have fever. Fever is not an emergency situation.

In the case of flu, you only need to consult your general practitioner if you do not improve after 4 or 5 days, have trouble breathing, are elderly or suffer from a chronic illness.



Remember that sensible use of the emergency services will avoid them being overrun and allow them to deal with serious cases properly.