

# COLD AND FLU

January 2017

This time of year the cold and flu are very common, here is your guide on how to protect yourself and those you love.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COLD AND FLU?

The common cold and flu are both types of infections caused by virus's. Both effect nose, sinuses and, sometimes, the chest (upper and lower respiratory system).

In a 'cold':

- You are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose
- On the whole, it doesn't result in serious health problems
- You usually start to get better within 72 hours

*Did you know...*

There are over 200 viruses known to cause the common cold.

The 'flu':

- Symptoms are more severe
  - You may have a fever or feel cold and shivery, sore throat, runny nose, stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue, tiredness
- It can lead to serious complications such as pneumonia which may result in hospitalisation
- There are only 3 viruses known to cause the flu
  - There are lots of different strains of these viruses
  - Every year the flu vaccine needs to be tailor made to the most common strain in that season.

## HOW IS THE COLD/FLU SPREAD?

Both of these illnesses have profound effects on the patient's quality of life, at any age.

These viruses enter the body via the nose, eyes and mouth either through the air we breathe or direct contact.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO AVOID IT?

### **Good hand hygiene and using a tissue if you sneeze**

If someone suffering from the cold or flu sneeze into their hands then touches table/chair/door handle etc and someone then touches that contaminated area, they can become infected.

Used tissues should be disposed of promptly, as opposed to being kept on the person where there is continued risk of contamination.

Please see the **AMMA presentation** on Hygiene to see how to properly wash your hands to prevent catching the cold and flu.

### **Vitamins supplements**

Vitamin supplements have not been proven to prevent the cold. There is some evidence which says that in an established cold, a daily dose of vitamin C may shorten the duration and severity however this is not a very big effect and maintaining good hygiene is key.

Some research has shown that Zinc supplements, in the recommended doses, within first 24 hours of onset of the cold could speed up recovery and lessen severity in healthy people.

Fresh fruit and vegetables particularly those dark green, red and yellow colour they contain natural vitamins which contribute to healthy life style.

### **Exercise**

Doing regular exercise is a natural way to increase your body's immune system which protects our body's from infections.

### **Stop smoking**

Smoking decreases your body's defences making you more likely to be susceptible to virus and bacterial infection. Inside the breathing system are a lining of hair cells which help beat away viruses and bacteria, smoking damages these.

### **Herbal option: Echinacea**

Echinacea was said to "prevent colds" however there is no significant evidence to support this. It is important to note that it should not be given to under 12 years old children.

## **WHO CAN GET THE FLU VACCINE ON THE NHS?**

Current national guidelines describe the below groups of people as eligible for the flu vaccine:

- Those aged 65 and over
- Those over the age of 18 but risk of developing the flu
  - Eg underlying health conditions, especially heart or lung disease, those with weakened immune systems
- Children aged 6 months – 2 years at risk of flu
- Pregnant women

## SUMMARY

Good hygiene is key to prevent contact with cold and flu viruses. Exercising regularly and eating fruit and vegetables will contribute to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

In spite of all this, if you still develop a cold or flu consider:

- Stay warm and take rest
  - Avoid socialising when unwell
- Keep hydrated
  - Some recommend soup or hot weak tea
  - Drink plenty of water
- Avoid stress
- Maintain good hygiene (see [AMMA presentation](#))
  - Wash your hands
  - Sneeze into a tissue and dispose of this

***MAY ALLAH KEEP US ALL HEALTHY, AMEEN.***