



COLORADO ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

2224 S. Fraser St., Unit 1, Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: 303-696-6655 Toll-Free: 800-468-8615 Fax: 303-696-7224

Myths & Fact: INFLUENZA VIRUS

As we enter fall and winter the influenza virus, "the flu," is a topic relevant to people of all ages. The separation of myth from fact is important as the community prepares to minimize the effects of this dangerous and, at times, deadly infection through primary prevention and vaccination.

MYTH: I had the flu in the past, so I do not need to worry about it this year.

FACT: Each year new and smarter forms of the influenza virus infect our population – each year we are exposed to a virus our bodies have never seen. Therefore, our immune system never "gets used to" the flu -- we must take active steps to prevent the spread of virus each year. This is especially true if any of the following apply to you:

- Weakened immune system
- Interaction with young children
- Work in a healthcare or nursing home setting
- Exposed to someone who has the flu
- Did not receive an annual flu shot

MYTH: I can only be infected with the flu if I am coughed upon.

FACT: The flu is caused from germs spread through the air in droplets when someone who has the flu coughs, sneezes, laughs, or talks. You can become infected when you inhale these germs directly. You can also become infected when you touch a surface on which the droplets have landed and then transfer the germs to your eyes, nose or mouth. Touching used tissues, or sharing utensils, drinking glasses or a toothbrush with an infected person can also expose you to flu germs.

MYTH: There is nothing I can do to prevent the spread of the flu.

FACT: There is plenty you can do each and every day!

- Get your flu shot! Studies show it is up to 70 percent effective and very safe for most every person over 6 months of age
- Wash your hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your sleeve, not your hands!
- Stay home until at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or chills.
- Don't share food, utensils, drinking glasses or a toothbrush with others.

MYTH: The flu is the same as the "common cold."

FACT: Flu symptoms tend to come on more quickly, are more severe and last longer (up to 2 weeks) than a cold. The signs and symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever higher than 101°F and chills
- Sore throat
- Headache and muscle aches

- Cough
- Runny nose
- Fatigue and weakness

MYTH: There is nothing I can do to feel better once I have the flu.

FACT: Although antibiotics are not of benefit, there are multiple steps to help ease the suffering from the flu.

- Drink lots of fluids such as water, juice, and warm soup to prevent dehydration. A good rule is to drink enough so that you urinate your normal amount.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Consider Tylenol or Advil for pain and fever, if okay with your physician.
- Ask your physician about the prescription medications available to shorten the illness.

Reviewed by:
Kevin M Piper, MD

This information is provided as a public service by the Colorado Academy of Family Physicians. For information about vaccinations and 2012 recommended immunization schedules, visit the American Academy of Family Physicians website at www.familydoctor.org. Information and data above accessed online from: www.who.int and www.cdc.gov