

## Flu Facts

Considering how common they are, colds and flu are the subject of a great many misconceptions. Dr. Seth Feltheimer, an associate attending physician, and Patricia Ciminera, nurse practitioner at New York- Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center, offer their insights and expertise on these sources of misery.

First, the differences: a cold is usually an upper respiratory tract infection with symptoms including a sore throat, head congestion, sinus pain, and a low grade fever. On the other hand, the flu is generally marked by a high fever, a sore throat, a cough, and body aches. A common cold usually lasts two to three days while the flu usually takes a week or more to abate. Unlike colds, the flu can lead to more serious complications and even hospitalization especially in high-risk individuals like asthmatics, people with compromised immune systems, and the elderly.

Now, on to the facts and the fallacies!

**The best way to prevent a cold is to wash your hands.**

### FACT OR FICTION?

**Fact!** The germs on your hands aren't just yours alone. They are picked up from other people from a variety of surfaces and unfortunately, not everyone is vigilant when it comes to hygiene. So remember Mom's rules about washing your hands and try to avoid people with colds.

*Source: New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center.*

**You can catch a cold from staying outside in the cold for too long.**

### FACT OR FICTION?

**Fiction!** Colds are transmitted by touching something that an infected person has touched, or by breathing in moisture that an infected person has coughed out. The reason people get more colds in winter is that they spend more time indoors and have more contact with each other.

*Source: New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center*

**Antibiotics can cure a cold or the flu.**

### FACT OR FICTION?

**Fiction!** A cold is a virus, and, therefore, cannot be treated with antibiotics. There are medications that can alleviate the symptoms of flu and make you feel better, but the best defense against the flu is to be vaccinated against it. There is

no vaccine for the common cold.

*Source: New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center*

**If you have the flu, you shouldn't go to work.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fact!** Going to work can expose your colleagues to infection. Sometimes, professional athletes play with the flu, but in those cases it is usually a different virus involved. The best advice is to rest and recover.

*Source: New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center.*

**Flu shots can give you the flu.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** Flu shots can produce very mild flu-like symptom for a short period, but this happens very infrequently.

*Source: New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center.*

**If you have a flu shot one year, you don't need it the next.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** Flu shots do not last for more than a year. And, the vaccine is reformulated each year to target the specific kind of virus, which may change from year to year.

*Source: New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center.*

**The flu vaccine is only for the elderly.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** The vaccine is for anyone who wants to reduce his or her chance of getting the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the flu vaccine particularly for children ages 6-23 months, pregnant women in the second or third trimester, people with chronic medical conditions, and the elderly.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control. Key Facts About Seasonal Influenza (Flu). (Accessed 10/1/08)-  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>*

**By January, it's too late to get the vaccine.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** It takes about two weeks for your body to make protective influenza antibodies. According to the CDC, the best time to get vaccinated is October or November, but getting the vaccine in December or later in the flu season will still protect you against the flu.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control. Key Fact About Seasonal Influenza (Flu). (Accessed 10/1/08)-  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>*

**Taking vitamin C or Echinacea will prevent the flu.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** Neither treatment has been conclusively proven to be effective against the flu.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control. Key Facts About Seasonal Influenza (Flu). (Accessed 10/1/08)-  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>*

**Antibacterial soaps are effective preventatives.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** Antibacterial soaps are useless against the influenza virus. Regular hand washing, however, is a simple and effective way to reduce the transmission of contagious diseases, including the flu.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control. Key Fact About Seasonal Influenza (Flu). (Accessed 10/1/08)-  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>*

**Starve a fever, feed a cold.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** No and no. If you feel sick, drink plenty of fluids and eat sensibly enough to satisfy your appetite. But don't forget to see your doctor as illness of any sort can play games with your blood sugar levels, which may cause you to over or under treat your diabetes.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control. Key Fact About Seasonal Influenza (Flu). (Accessed 10/1/08)-*

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

**The flu shot does not work.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fiction!** Most of the time the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70%-90% when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. Getting the vaccine is your best protection against this disease.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control. Key Facts About Seasonal Influenza (Flu). (Accessed 10/1/08)-*  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

**You can get the flu from kissing.**

**FACT OR FICTION?**

**Fact!** Yes, you can. Sorry! Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That's means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick. But if it makes you feel better, you are more likely to catch someone's germs through a common handshake than kissing.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control. Key Facts About Seasonal Influenza (Flu). (Accessed 10/1/08)-*  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

Get more facts on the flu by visiting <http://www.dlife.com/diabetes/information/illness/diabetes-flu.html>.

