

## FLU AND YOU

Influenza - better known nowadays as flu, is spread by a virus. It can strike at any time, but it's much more common in the winter months. Happily, for most of us and for most of the time, flu – though it can be very unpleasant – is a short-lived illness from which we make a full recovery. So, if we are otherwise healthy, how do we know whether we have caught flu rather than one of the other common winter ailments and, if we have, what should we do about it?

If you *do* have flu, you are likely to be feverish; your temperature may rise from the normal 36.9°C (98.4°F) to 38°C (100°F) or even higher. You'll feel tired and weak, and will probably have a headache. You'll have other general aches and pains and may have a dry, chesty cough. You may also have 'ordinary' cold symptoms like a blocked or runny nose, bouts of sneezing or a sore throat, but these are unlikely to be as severe as the other symptoms mentioned.

So what's to be done? As flu is caused by a virus, antibiotics have no effect; there's no cure, so there's no need to visit the surgery. Stay away from work or school – your performance will be well under par and you'll simply pass on the infection to others. Rest at home; drink plenty of liquids to avoid dehydration and take paracetamol or ibuprofen to bring down your temperature and relieve your aches and pains. Remember that aspirin should not be given to anyone under 16. You should feel much better in about a week, though the tiredness may last quite a bit longer.

If you are in one of the particularly vulnerable groups – you are under 18 or over 65, or you are pregnant, have a weakened immune system (whether caused by an existing illness or by chemotherapy), suffer from diabetes or have a lung, heart, kidney or neurological disease, you should be extra careful. Contact the surgery if your symptoms are still getting worse after two or three days, or if you aren't beginning to feel better after a full week,

Whether or not you are in one of these groups, you should contact the surgery right away if you experience chest pains or shortage of breath, or you begin to cough up blood. These additional symptoms may mean that there is a risk of complications developing; left untreated, you may be at risk of bronchitis, pneumonia or a range of other illnesses which, though rare as complications arising from flu, can be extremely serious.

Flu spreads in tiny water droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can travel about a metre (three to four feet), after which they settle on any horizontal surface. If you're the flu victim, be sure to cover your mouth fully with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze, and bin the tissue immediately. Everyone should wash their hands frequently, using soap and warm water, and likely host surfaces should be cleaned regularly, using disinfectant wipes if you have them. Keyboards, telephones, door handles, cutlery and newspapers are all easy carriers of infection.

Finally, if you (or anyone in your household) is eligible for free vaccination, see the reminder below and act NOW!

### ORDER EARLY FOR CHRISTMAS!

If you use repeat prescriptions and expect to need further supplies towards the end of December, remember that we'll be closed on the bank holidays and that it can take 48 hours – equivalent to two full working days – to process your request. To make sure that you have all the medication you need over the holiday period, please submit your repeat order early – ideally no later than Friday 18 December.

### WINTER JAB REMINDER

Free influenza injections are still available for eligible patients who were unable to attend one of our clinics. Protection is important for everyone over 65 and for all other patients with heart disease, diabetes, chest problems such as bronchitis or asthma, or long-term kidney disease. To make an appointment, just contact reception in the usual way. Remember, you need a flu injection *every* year to give you maximum protection.

**BEST WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR**



FROM EVERYONE AT

**HEATON ROAD SURGERY**



## PATIENTS' GROUP

The next quarterly meeting of our Patients' Group will be held on **Tuesday 8 March**, starting at 6.00pm. As the Surgery is open late on Tuesdays the meeting will be held upstairs – please ask for directions at Reception.

Any patient registered with the Practice is entitled to attend and take part in the discussions – just come along and take a seat.

## FREE NHS HEALTH CHECKS

In the medical profession we are very well aware that prevention is better than cure. For example, the chances of surviving a heart attack may be vastly better today than they were a generation ago, but the survival rate is better still if you don't have a heart attack in the first place!

If you are aged from 40 to 74 you are entitled to a free NHS health check every five years. On average, the check takes less than half-an-hour, and it's designed to identify those who are at a higher-than-average risk of major health problems such as a stroke or heart attack or of developing conditions such as angina, kidney disease or type 2 diabetes.

We'll record your height, weight, age, sex and ethnicity, and talk about your family medical history and about any medication you are taking at the moment. We'll also do a simple blood test to check your cholesterol level.

This may be all that's needed, but if there are any doubts or concerns we'll explain what's happening and make any necessary tests to clarify the situation. Even if there's a history of the above problems in your family, risk assessment can often help you to avoid them.

We'll take you through the results and explain what they mean, and you'll be given personalised advice about how to lower your risk and maintain a healthy lifestyle. If necessary, we'll prescribe any appropriate treatment or medication.

You have nothing to lose, but you may have a great deal to gain. Why not contact Reception today to set up an appointment and give yourself the best possible start to the New Year?

## KEEP TAKING THE MEDICINE!

Be sure to keep taking any prescribed medication over the holiday period; it's the sort of thing that can easily be overlooked when your daily routine is disrupted. It's important to complete **any** course of medication prescribed for you, and if you are on any kind of long-term medication you should **never** stop taking it without discussing this with your doctor beforehand.

## HOLIDAY OPENING HOURS

We'll be open as usual Monday to Friday *except* on the three weekday Bank Holidays –

**Friday 25 December 2015**

**Monday 28 December 2015**

**Friday 1 January 2016**

We'll be open as usual until 6.00pm., on Christmas Eve (24 December) and New Year's Eve (31 December).

The next Bank Holiday closures will be on Good Friday (25 March) and Easter Monday (28 March).

In the meantime, remember that the Surgery closes for staff training every Thursday lunchtime, from 12.00 to 1.30pm. We will also be closed for training purposes all afternoon (closing at 12.00 noon) on:

**Thursday 3 March 2016**

If you need urgent medical assistance at any time when we are closed, cover is available. Simply telephone 111; this is not just an out of hours service – you can get help and advice and, if a home visit is needed, you will be seen by a Doctor from Northern Doctors Urgent Care.

If you have a major medical emergency needing an ambulance, you should telephone 999 immediately.

## BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

In Britain, Christmas is traditionally a family time but, especially in today's hectic world, it's a time to think of the folk who no longer have a family around them. For them, it's a difficult and lonely time, so if you have a neighbour living alone – especially someone who is old or otherwise infirm, please take the time to keep an eye out for them. Check that they have everything they need over the holiday period – you might even think of popping a Christmas card through their door!

## HEATON ROAD HEALTH TIP No. 10

If you're a healthy eating enthusiast, a visit to [www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthychristmas](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthychristmas) will provide you with lots of ideas – there's even a link to info about hangover cures! However, if you can't bring yourself to cut back on the Christmas goodies and you don't have any specific dietary restrictions, console yourself with the thought that humans have feasted at the time of the Winter Solstice for thousands of years. The really important thing is to make sure that you work off the extra calories as soon as the festivities are over. Don't let over-indulgence become a habit.

And – above all – **never, ever** drink and drive. You may feel as though you are on top of your game, but you aren't ... and it's not just your own life you are putting at risk. Don't risk ruining another family's happiness.

Be sensible, be safe and be happy!