

Care for Upper Respiratory Infections

Community Letter from Dr. Holsinger, M.D., Director, Pittsburg State University Health Service dated January 1, 2007.

To members of the Pittsburg State University community:

Over the last several years, there has been increasing concern over a possible worldwide outbreak of upper respiratory infections caused by viruses such as the influenza virus, SARS, and now the avian flu virus. As flu season approaches, all of us need to do as much as we can to protect ourselves individually and to protect our community from an outbreak of one of these viruses.

With that in mind, I ask that you follow general health practices which can help minimize your individual chance of contracting an upper respiratory infection and also reduce the risk of spreading the virus to others on campus. In an effort to keep us all informed about healthy practices and flu prevention, we have made educational material available on the Health Service Website. I encourage you to visit this site for information on prevention and for suggestions on the care of upper respiratory infections.

I also recommend as your primary healthcare provider that you help protect yourself and the community from the influenza virus by receiving a flu vaccine each fall. Flu Vaccine clinics will be offered every year pending the availability of vaccine. The Health Service will keep the community updated on that availability.

If we individually and collectively practice good hygiene, get flu shots when available, and take care of ourselves when illness occurs, we can minimize the chances that an upper respiratory viral outbreak will occur at PSU this winter. Students and employees who do develop symptoms of the flu should stay home from classes and work until their symptoms have abated. I will be in touch if there are changes in worldwide flu developments that could affect the PSU community.

What is an Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)?

A URI is any type of infection of the head and chest that is caused by a virus. It can affect your nose, throat, sinuses and ears. It could also affect the tube that connects your middle ear and throat, and your windpipe, voice box and airways.

How Does it Occur?

Viruses are germs that cause infections. Over 200 viruses can cause URIs. The infection is spread when viruses are passed to others by sneezing, coughing, or personal contact. You may also become infected by handling objects that were touched by someone with an URI.

You are more likely to get a URI if:

- You are emotionally or physically stressed.
- You are tired.
- You are not eating enough healthy food.
- You are a smoker.
- You are living or working in crowded conditions.

What are the Symptoms of URI?

Symptoms may include:

- Scratchy or sore throat
- Sneezing, runny nose, and nasal congestion
- Cough
- Watery eyes
- Ear congestion
- Slight fever (99 to 100°F or 37.2 to 37.8°C)
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Loss of appetite

How are URI symptoms treated?

You usually start having URI symptoms one to three days after contact with a cold virus. You can treat them with non-prescription medicines and other self-care items.

If you have a **slight fever, headache or muscle/joint aches**, you may take any of these non-prescription medicines:

- Acetaminophen 325 mg (take 2 every 4-6 hours, up to 12 total per 24 hours)
- or Ibuprofen 200 mg (take 1 every 4-6 hours, up to 6 total per 24 hours)
- or Naproxen Sodium 220 mg (take 1 every 8 hours, up to 3 total per 24 hours)

If your **throat is sore**, you may try:

- Sucking on throat lozenges or popsicles may be helpful.
- Gargling with salt water (use one teaspoon of salt in a large glass of warm water every four hours.)

If you have a **stuffy nose**:

- Use a decongestant (e.g. Sudafed or Pseudoephedrine)
- or, use saline nose drops to relieve nasal dryness
- or, you can buy nose drops or make your own. To make a solution for nose drops, add one teaspoon of salt to a quart of water.

If you have a **runny nose**, use a mild antihistamine (e.g. Benadryl or Diphenhydramine)

If you have a **cough**, use a cough medication (e.g. Robitussin or the generic equivalent) or cough drops.

NOTE: Many over-the-counter non-prescription combination products (such as NyQuil, Comtrex, etc) have significant amounts of acetaminophen/ ibuprofen/ pseudoephedrine in them. Please do not take additional amounts of these medications when you use a combination product.

How Long will a URI Last?

URIs usually may last one to two weeks.

How can I take care of myself?

- Drink lots of fluids (*water, fruit juice, tea, clear soup broths and non-caffeinated carbonated beverages*).
- Inhale warm moist air. Use a *humidifier, take showers* or put a *pan of water on your radiator*.

When should I see a health care provider?

See your health care provider when you have any of the following symptoms:

- Temperature of 102°F (38.9°C) or higher
- shaking chills
- Difficulty breathing/wheezing
- Chest pain
- Skin rash
- Worsening sore throat
- White or yellow spots on your tonsils or throat
- A cough that gets worse or becomes painful
- Severe headache
- Mental confusion
- Blue or gray lips, skin or nails
- Worsening earache

Your health care provider can evaluate whether your symptoms are due to a bacterial infection and determine whether you need antibiotics.

How do I prevent URI transmission?

- Turn away from others and use tissues when you cough or sneeze.

- Wash your hands (or use portable cleansers) after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Wash your hands before touching food, dishes, glasses, silverware or napkins or computer keyboards.
- Use paper cups and paper towels in bathrooms.
- Don't let your nose or mouth touch public telephones or drinking fountains.
- Don't share food or eating utensils with others.
- Avoid close contact with others for the first two to four days.
- Keep your hands away from your nose and mouth.
- Eat healthy foods, especially fruits with vitamin C, such as oranges.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Do not smoke.
- Wear a face mask if you have a cough.

Suggested Shopping List for the Pharmacy

- Acetaminophen 325 mg OR Ibuprofen 200 mg OR Naproxen Sodium 220 mg
- Sudafed (or generic equivalent Pseudoephedrine) if your nose is stuffy
- Benadryl (or generic equivalent Diphenhydramine) if your nose is runny
- Robitussin DM (or generic equivalent) or cough drops for a cough
- Throat lozenges for a sore throat
- Thermometer
- Non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic beverages and chicken broth based soups

Any student requesting a medical evaluation may visit the Student Health Center during our hours of operation, Monday- Friday 8:00am - 4:00pm.