

## Flu data sheet

Anyone has experienced at least once in their lifetime, **flu**, regardless of the lifestyle and age.

### **But what is flu and what are the symptoms?**

It is a disease caused by **virus** infecting the **airways** (nose, throat, lungs) and manifests with annual epidemics during the winter season. The **transmission** of viral particles can occur through droplets of saliva of who coughs or sneezes, but also through contact with hands contaminated with these **respiratory secretions**.

The classic symptoms of flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, muscle and joint pain and headache, but in some cases it may be possible to experience complications due to the simultaneous occurrence of bacterial infections, normally at respiratory tract, such as bronchitis or pneumonia.

### **How do you prevent flu?**

Just **simple gestures** such as protecting your mouth when sneezing or coughing and washing your hands often, especially after blowing your nose, to avoid getting flu and infect others. But the first preventive measure is indeed the **flu vaccine**.

### **The flu vaccine**

It is available at pharmacies and is recommended for those who want to avoid to get flu. The vaccine is **offered for free** to the people who run an increased risk that a simple flu turns into something more serious. For example, the flu vaccination is a tool of prevention extremely effective in adults over the age of 65 in whom it is preferable to avoid complications due to flu, and thus a possible hospitalisation. The vaccine also protects women who are at the beginning of the flu season in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. In this way the future mothers protect not only themselves, by not using drugs during pregnancy, but also babies in their first months of life when they can not yet be vaccinated. Finally, adults with chronic diseases such as diabetes, immune, cardiovascular or respiratory disorders and children should get vaccinated, also in this case, to reduce the risk of hospitalisation.

It is important to get vaccinated at the beginning of each new flu season because the protection provided by the vaccine lasts for only one season (6-8 months) and because viruses that are in circulation can change every year.

### **How to cure flu?**

Flu has its natural course and, under normal circumstances, resolves spontaneously within a week or a little more. However, your doctor may prescribe the specific drugs to relieve the more annoying symptoms of flu. For example, in the case of fever it is possible to use paracetamol (for children and adults) and acetylsalicylic acid (for adults), for pains in the bones, muscles, or in case of headache may be useful drugs such as NSAIDs commonly used to reduce the intensity of symptoms. Sore throat can instead be relieved with local decongestants and for cough are sufficient sedative syrups in the case of dry cough, or mucolytics and expectorants, in case of chesty cough to eliminate the excess phlegm.

It is important to know that antibiotics have no effect on flu because they act only in case of bacterial infections. They should be taken only if prescribed by a doctor and if there is suspicion of a concurrent bacterial infection, for example if a sore throat, cough or fever does not improve in 4-5 days. Finally, antiviral drugs that directly inhibit viral replication, can be used only if the doctor actually confirms that it is the flu virus and must be taken within 48 hours from the onset of flu symptom.

### **What are the recommendations to deal with the flu season?**

- Avoid crowded places or smaller indoor locations because in these conditions it is favoured the proliferation of the virus and is easier to come into contact with someone who has flu.
- If you got flu already is better to stay home and **contact your doctor**.
- It is recommended to drink plenty of water and eat properly and in a balanced manner.

### **Bibliography**

- CDC, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm>
- <http://www.osservatorioinfluenza.it/>
- Ministero della Salute (Ministry of Health), <http://www.salute.gov.it>

