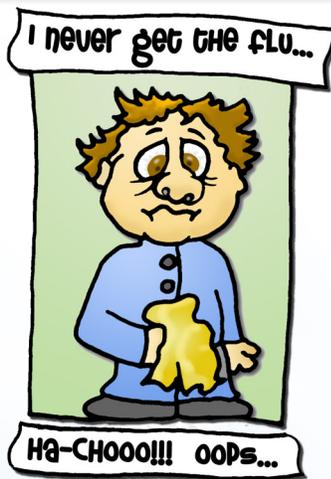


85% of Flu Deaths have occurred in Unvaccinated People

63 U.S. Children have died from Influenza as of early February

Do Flu Shots Even Work?

by Doug Puder, MD



This has been the worst flu season in a decade. There is a type of **Influenza A Virus** known as the **H3N2** strain which is making even vaccinated people sick. Remember though that vaccinated people have milder illness with a much lower risk of complications. Several different types of flu have been reported in high numbers in every state in the country. Flu vaccine is working well against the **Influenza B** strain. It is not too late for flu vaccine!

Flu symptoms often include fever/chills/bodyaches/sneezing/coughing/sore throat/headache. But sometimes it can begin without fever or a number of these symptoms. If your child develops symptoms like this, call us right away. If we can treat your child within the first 48 hours of flu symptoms, we can give an antiviral medication called *Tamiflu* (oseltamivir).

We will need to complete a careful exam of your child to rule out other causes of fever cough and congestion, then maybe test for flu. We listen for wheezing or pneumonia, we look for ear or sinus infections, we may rule out strep throat.

If tamiflu makes sense, we will recommend it. Remember good handwashing and try not to touch your eyes, mouth, or nose until you've washed your hands.

If you are sick, stay home until there is no fever for 24 hours and the cough and congestion are mostly gone. If illness lasts more than one week, we should re-examine for complications.

Here is a review of other flu treatments...

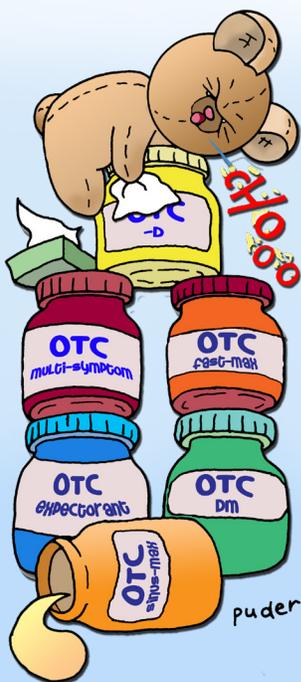
Do OTC (over the counter) cold and flu products help?

We encourage plain acetaminophen (*tylenol*) or ibuprofen (*motrin* or *advil*) for fever or aches. We like saline nosedrops, a humidifier or steam in the shower.

So why not try the **OTC** (over-the-counter) cold medications we see advertised? Because they have side effects and they can't be shown to work in **any** study. When these various **OTC** medications were tested against a teaspoon of honey, the honey won! Avoid "multisymptom" products with *acetaminophen* as children may not get the right dose.

The FDA has already taken a number of **OTC** medications off the market such as *phenylpropanolamine* and *ephedrine*.

Pseudo-ephedrine (the ingredient in *Sudafed* and any product ending with **xxx-D**) can raise blood pressure and is being reviewed by the FDA for safety. *Mucinex* (*Guafenesin*) is advertised as an expectorant but has not been shown to be effective. An FDA advisory board recommends that **OTC** cough and cold medicines **"not be given to children under 6 years old because of lack of effectiveness and potential for side effects"**.



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What about a bit o' Honey?

What about honey? It was used as a placebo in several studies, so we are not pushing honey, but it did give some relief.

Honey cannot be given to infants under age 12 months as it could cause infant botulism. Those with allergy to bees should also avoid it.

The families of children given a teaspoon of honey at bedtime were reported to have the best improvements in coughing, beating *dextromethorphan* and *guaifenesin* (*mucinex*) the most common **OTC** cough remedies. Why would honey work? It's soothing, tastes good, contains antioxidants. And it's alot cheaper than **OTC** products!



What about Vitamin C?

In the 1970's chemist Linus Pauling wrote that **Vitamin C** was going to be amazing in treating colds and flu. This has been disproven after many, many studies. While too little **Vitamin C** causes a disease called Scurvy, high dose **Vitamin C** does not shorten the length or severity of colds and flu. It is a water soluble vitamin which means the body gets rid of (pees out) extra **Vitamin C** when there is more than needed. It is also an acid which can be tough on the stomach. So a one-a-day vitamin, or a glass of juice, or a piece of fruit, *sure*. Megadoses of **Vitamin C**, no.



What about Zinc?

No benefit has been shown in most studies, and very minimal benefit shown in only a few studies (a few hours shorter illness). Short-term use, less than 5 days, shouldn't cause serious side effects, but it can make your mouth irritated, leave a metallic taste, or give you an upset stomach. Long term use can lead to copper deficiency. We do not recoment zinc for colds or flu, especially in children.



What about Elderberry?

There is no research to show that **Elderberry** works in children, and there is no information about a safe or proper dose. Be aware that eating them raw can make you sick. They contain a toxic compound related to cyanide which can be poisonous if not thoroughly cooked. We understand that there may be some benefit to anti-oxidants, but these are contained in so many other healthy fruits, berries, and vegetables.



What about Chicken Soup? What about Tea?

My grandma did make the best chicken soup ever, just sayin'. Chicken soup appears to help fight colds in at least two research studies. It helps clear nasal congestion as well as thin mucus so you can better cough it up.

Also, research shows it may have a mild anti-inflammatory effect that can help ease cold symptoms.

Drinking hot tea is another great old home remedy. Hot tea helps to thin mucus and ensure proper hydration of the body. Green and black teas are filled with flavonoids, which are potent antioxidants.



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