
Flu

Patient and staff information



What is seasonal flu?

Seasonal influenza (the flu) occurs every year, usually in the winter. It is a highly infectious viral disease that can lead to hospitalisation and sometimes death. Anyone can get ill from the flu, including people who are normally healthy.

How is flu spread?

The flu virus is spread by small droplets of saliva coughed or sneezed into the air by an infected person. These can be inhaled or can land in the mouths and noses of people up to six feet away. If you breathe in these droplets, you may become infected. Flu can also spread if someone with the virus touches surfaces such as door handles with unwashed hands.

Preventing flu

To help reduce your risk of catching or spreading flu virus:

- Get vaccinated
- Use tissues to cover your mouth and nose if you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in a bin as soon as possible
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use an alcohol hand sanitiser (especially after sneezing or coughing)
- Clean surfaces regularly with soap and water
- Stay at home and away from work if you have symptoms of flu.

Remember: Catch it! Bin it! Kill it!

Vaccination

The seasonal flu vaccine can protect against the flu. Researchers identify the most likely circulating strains of the virus each year, in advance of the flu season, and produce a vaccine to match them.

The vaccine should provide protection throughout the forthcoming flu season and can help to protect you, your family and our patients.

Flu vaccines **cannot** cause the flu. Flu vaccines are made with either killed or weakened viruses.

Mild flu-like symptoms may be experienced by a few people following vaccination. These side effects usually occur within 3 days and disappear within 1-3 days without treatment.

It is important to remember that the flu vaccination will not give you protection from many of the other circulating respiratory viruses.

What are the symptoms?

If you have a fever or high temperature (more than 38°C/100.4°F) and two or more of the following symptoms, you may have flu:

- aching muscles
- headache
- runny nose
- sore throat
- shortness of breath or cough.

How long do the symptoms last?

Symptoms develop 1-4 days after being infected and will usually peak after 2-3 days. You should begin to feel much better within 5-8 days, however it can make you feel ill for many weeks. Try to avoid all unnecessary contact with others during this infectious period.

A cough and general tiredness may last for 2-3 weeks, however in some people, flu develops into more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

What is the treatment?

The best treatment for flu is to rest, drink plenty of fluids, keep warm and take over-the-counter remedies such as paracetamol and/or ibuprofen to lower temperature and ease aches and pains.

Flu is a virus so antibiotics will not work, but if caught early, you may be given an antiviral such as oseltamivir (tamiflu) to reduce the potential complications and relieve symptoms.

Pregnancy

In pregnancy, the immune system is naturally suppressed which means that pregnant individuals are at higher risk of flu and its complications.

If you are pregnant you will be offered (and are recommended to have) the flu vaccination this year. It can be given at any stage in pregnancy and whilst breastfeeding.

Nasal vaccine

There is a nasal vaccine which is offered to young children through the childhood flu programme. This is a live nasal vaccine so it is not recommended for patients with blood disorders or cancer that affects the immune system.

The Department of Health advises flu vaccination to protect yourself against flu.

All staff at The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust are offered and encouraged to have the vaccination to protect themselves, their families and our patients.

Our patients are actively encouraged to seek flu vaccination from their GP.

Please don't wait until there is a flu outbreak this winter.

The flu jab is free, so make an appointment with your Occupational Health team or GP surgery.



CATCH IT



BIN IT



KILL IT

Further advice

Infection Prevention and Control Team

Internal: Ext. 1409/1085 (Sutton)
Ext. 4068/4168 (Chelsea)

External: 020 8661 3917/3611

Occupational Health (for staff)

The Royal Marsden intranet

The NHS website at www.nhs.uk

Includes an online flu symptom checker and advice on whether you need further medical advice – click on the Colds and Flu link or call 111 to speak directly with a medical adviser.

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

References

This leaflet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this leaflet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Freephone: 0800 783 7176

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

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Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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