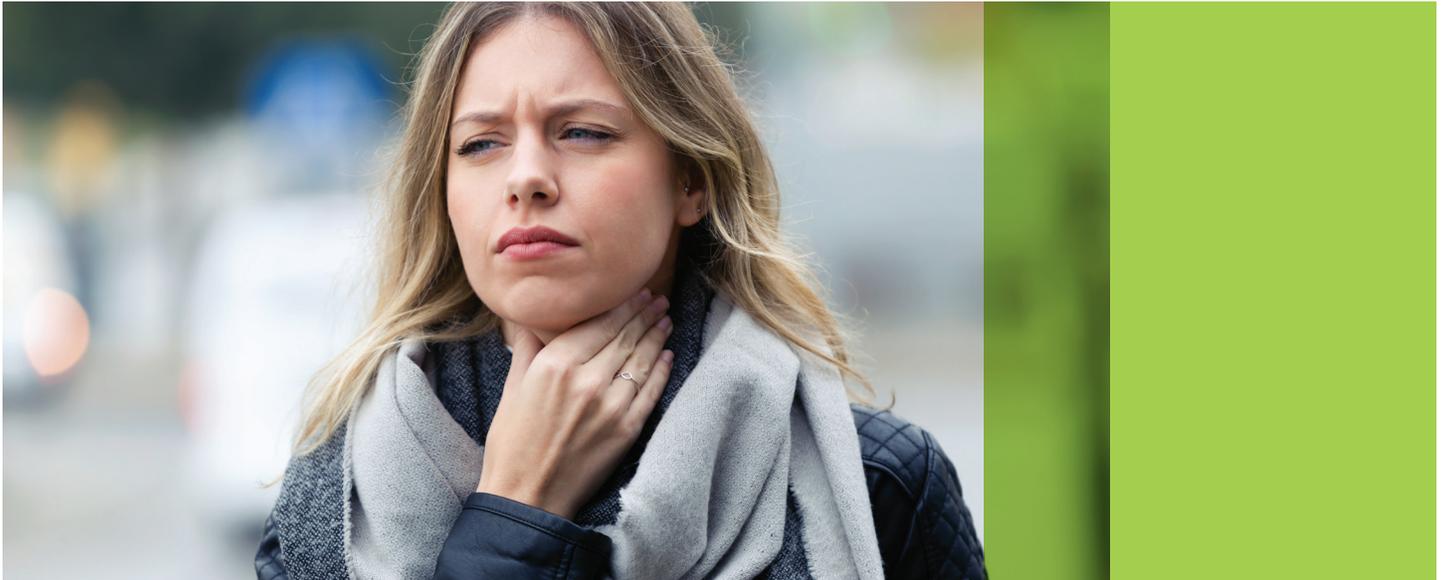# Five common questions about cold and flu season

Cold and flu Q&A

There are many misconceptions about avoiding colds and the flu, how germs are spread and treatment options. Here are five common questions people ask:

Question 1: Can you get the flu from the flu vaccination?[1]

No. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that the flu vaccination is one of the most effective defenses against catching the flu. The vaccine itself is made from an inactivated virus that can't transmit the infection. The myth may have developed because people can still get sick after vaccination until the vaccine takes effect, which can take up to a week or even two. So be careful around people who are sick during that time.

Question 2: Should I take antibiotics for a cold or flu?[2]

No. Antibiotics are only useful in fighting bacteria, and both the cold and flu are infections from viruses. Sometimes, colds can lead to a bacterial infection in your lungs, sinuses or ears. If that happens, your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics, but only at the time that a bacterial infection is suspected.

Question 3: Can someone who has no symptoms of the flu infect me?[3,4]

Yes. Most healthy adults can spread the flu virus to others a day before their symptoms develop and up to seven days after becoming sick.

Question 4: What medicine or remedy will cure a cold or flu?[2,4]

There is no cure for a cold or the flu. Both have to run their course. There are certain prescription medications, called antiviral drugs, that can lessen fever and flu symptoms and shorten the time you are sick. Most medicines or remedies you try would be to relieve the symptoms of the infection to help you feel better. However, it's extremely important to remember that even if you take something that makes you feel less congested or reduces your fever, you're still contagious to other people.

Questions 5: Can I really get the flu or a cold from the germs on a door handle or cell phone?[3,4]

Yes. Both cold and flu viruses can live outside the body. They can survive for periods of time on non-porous surfaces, like desks, keyboards and countertops, and even porous surfaces, like tissues, clothing and towels. The amount of time varies, depending on a number of factors. That's why it's important to disinfect common surfaces both at home and work and to wash your hands with soap and water frequently.

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Sources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key Facts about Seasonal Flu Vaccine, August 25, 2022. Available from www.cdc.gov.

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3. American Lung Association. Flu Symptoms, Causes, and Risk Factors, October 23, 2020. Available from www.lung.org.

4. Harvard Health Publications/Harvard Medical School. 10 Flu Myths: Dispelling Misinformation about the Flu Vaccine, Sickness, Treatment, and Recovery, October 1, 2020. Available from www.health.harvard.edu.

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