

**Common Seasonal Illnesses**

It is that time of year again. Along with cheer and joy, the holiday season brings stress and the spreading of unwanted germs. There are a number of common illnesses that pop up every year in the fall and winter months including the rhinovirus, influenza, and norovirus.

The rhinovirus, also known as the common cold, is caused by a viral infection located in the nose. Adults average two to three colds per year and children six to ten, depending on their age and exposure. Influenza (or the flu) is caused by viruses that infect the respiratory tract. The flu can cause a more serious illness than the common cold. The flu is unpredictable and the virus can morph making finding a vaccine difficult. The flu virus effects on average more than 200,000 Americans every year.

The norovirus, more commonly known as stomach flu, is a group of viruses that affect the lining of the stomach and intestines. Other common names for the norovirus includes Norwalk-like viruses (NLVs),

**Seasonal Illness Prevention**

caliciviruses or small round structured viruses.

**Seasonal Illness Transmission**

There are over 100 different cold viruses that can be transmitted, rhinoviruses causing at least one-half of colds. Children’s noses are the major source of cold viruses. Cold viruses can only multiply when they are inside of living cells. Cold viruses cannot multiply on environmental surfaces but may be transmitted from the surface to nose. Cold viruses live only in human noses.

The flu viruses are spread from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes up to six feet away. The droplets can land in the mouth or nose of people who are nearby or may also be inhaled. The flu is rarely picked-up from surface to mouth or nose contact. The flu is contagious one day before symptoms occur and up to seven days after becoming sick.

The norovirus is spread through several ways. Eating foods or drinking liquids that are contaminated with norovirus is one route of transmission. Touching surfaces or objects contaminated with norovirus and putting your hands in your mouth is another route. Having direct contact with a person who is symptomatic with norovirus, such as caring for or sharing utensils with someone who is ill is also a way the virus is transmitted. Transmission of noroviruses is very common because the body has a hard time building up long lasting immunity to the viruses due to multiple strands of the virus.

**Seasonal Illness Prevention**

Transmission of seasonal illnesses varies but the guidelines for prevention are common amongst the three being discussed in this article. The following are easy ways to help prevent the spread of seasonal illnesses.

* Wash hands or use antibacterial/ antimicrobial hand sanitizer after contact with others or surfaces.
* Clean surfaces around the home with products such as Lysol or other disinfectant products.
* Do not eat or drink after other people.
* If you are sick, cover sneezes with a tissue and cover coughs with the inside of the elbow.
* Avoid contact with others when infected with an illness when at all possible, especially if fever is present.
* Carefully wash fruits and vegetables.
* Get a flu vaccine.
* Find a healthy way to deal with stress.

**Symptoms of Seasonal Illnesses**

The common cold is often confused with the flu. Symptoms vary with severity of the infection. The common cold rarely presents with fever or headaches. General aches and pains may occur. Stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat, and mild to moderate chest discomfort with a hacking cough are the most common symptoms of the common cold. Sinus congestion, middle ear infection, or asthma may occur as complications with more severe cases of the common cold.

The flu frequently presents with a high fever (100o to 1020F) lasting three to four days, severe general aches and pains, fatigue and weakness lasting up to two to three weeks, and extreme exhaustion. Chest discomfort and headaches are also common symptoms that may become more severe. Stuffy nose, sneezing, and sore throat may occur but are not common symptoms of the flu. Bronchitis, pneumonia, and hospitalization may occur in more severe infections. The flu can be life threatening.

Common symptoms of norovirus include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and some stomach cramping. Low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness may also occur. Symptoms last one to two days, usually. Diarrhea is more common in children and vomiting is more common in adults. A common complication of the norovirus is dehydration.

**Seasonal Illness Treatment**

The seasonal illnesses presented in this article are all viruses. Viruses cannot be cured with medication such as an antibiotic; they simply must run their course as the body develops immunity for the strand of virus that has infected the host. The infected person or health care provider can only administer medications that will reduce the intensity of the symptoms.

Common Cold treatments include:

* Decongestants and antihistamines
* Nasal spray
* Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines

Influenza treatments include:

* Antiviral administered by a doctor
* Aspirin to reduce fever in adults

Norovirus treatments include:

* IV fluids for severe dehydration
* If able to eat foods and drinks that settle the stomach such as saltines and ginger ale

The best treatment for these illnesses is plenty of rest and drinking fluids. Contact a doctor if symptoms are uncontrollable.

**Resources**

* <http://www.ccbh.net/ccbh/opencms/CCBH/modules/hotZoneArticles/0043.html>
* [http://www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-qa.htm)
* <http://www.commoncold.org/undrstn2.htm>
* <http://diarrhea.emedtv.com/norovirus-gastroenteritis/norovirus-transmission.html>
* <http://www.healthnewsflash.com/conditions/flu.php>
* <http://www.medicinenet.com/norovirus_infection/page4.htm>
* <http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/cold-guide/common-cold-prevention>

**Upcoming Events:**

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).

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