



**Flu - What causes it?**

The real flu (Influenza) deals with an acute infection that is always caused by the influenza virus. Different viruses can be responsible for a similar kind of flu infection but a milder one. The influenza viruses that are spread all over the world are highly contagious so that many people suffer from flu in a particular season.

**How does a flu develop?**

Influenza viruses affect the mucosal cells in the respiratory tracts, destroy them and spread to other cells. The resulting inflammatory reaction causes the flu symptoms. The inhalation of tiny droplets that contain the virus, which an infected person spreads while sneezing and coughing, is the most significant route of transmission. The virus can be transmitted even via hands and - rarely - via fomites such as doorbells or handrails in the bus. There is a high risk of infection when there are several people in a closed room.

**What are the symptoms of flu and how does it progress?**

The first symptoms of the illness occur in around two days after manifestation. While the common cold commences slowly, the flu has a sudden and acute onset - frequently with fever above 38.5 degrees, dry cough, hoarseness, sore throat, muscular pain and headache, general weakness and fatigue. Shivering, sweat attacks, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are other symptoms that the patient may experience. The symptoms experienced and their intensity may differ from patient to patient. There is a danger of passing on the infection to others from day one to day five after the initial symptoms are seen. Most of the times, a flu is cured after one to two weeks without any consequences. However the coughing can last for a distinctly longer period of time in older patients.

**How is flu treated and what care must be taken?**

Antibiotics can be life-saving for illnesses caused by bacteria. A flu, however, is caused by a viral infection, so these medicines are not effective for flu. For supporting the healing process, it is important to avoid physical exertion, get adequate sleep, drink lots of fluids and avoid smoking. In order to protect the people in your close vicinity from getting infected, you should take care of the following:

- Use paper tissues while coughing or sneezing as you can dispose them off immediately or sneeze in the crook of the arm.
- Wash your hand frequently and avoid shaking hands with anyone.
- Ensure that the patient's room is properly ventilated. The patient must be isolated from other family members in the night and while eating.

The most effective and the most important prophylaxis against influenza is a flu vaccine that should be taken annually before the start of the flu season in October/November.