



The Influenza A(H1N1) virus is making media headlines, and as more is learned about the illness, misinformation can cloud the facts. This fact sheet helps to dispel myths about the seasonal and H1N1 flu and set the facts straight.

Myth: Influenza is like the common cold, and symptoms will be alleviated after a few days.

Get the Facts: Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The flu can be a severe and sometimes life-threatening disease. Seasonal influenza is associated with almost 36,000 deaths and more than 200,000 hospital visits in the U.S. each year, while a novel strain called swine Influenza A (H1N1), has affected communities in more than 70 countries around the world.

Myth: There's nothing that can be done to protect me from getting the flu – I will catch it anyway.

Get the Facts: Practicing preventive measures and good hygiene is one way to limit the potential spread of illness. For a full list of prevention tips, visit www.columbia.edu/cu/student-services/preparedness.

Also, if you are ill, staying in your dorm room or at home as well as not attending campus events or large gatherings (e.g., group meetings) can help to limit the spread of illness.

Students who experience flu-like symptoms and need advice can contact Health Services at 212-854-2284.

It is important to note that students should contact their Advising Dean, if class needs to be missed due to severe illness.

Myth: It's common to catch the flu from things like door handles, toilet seats and keyboards.

Get the Facts: Not so, but you can do simple things like washing hands regularly and covering coughs or sneezes to help prevent infection of the flu.

Myth: I can catch the flu from going outdoors in the cold weather.

Get the Facts: Not true. In fact, the flu is more common in the winter months because that is when the virus spreads across the country. It has very little to do with being outside in the cold weather.

Myth: "Feed a cold and starve a fever (flu)."

Get the Facts: This is definitely not a good idea in either case. More fluids than usual are needed when someone has the flu or a cold. It is recommended to drink plenty of water and juice, eat enough food to satisfy an appetite, and drink hot fluids to ease a cough and sore throat.

Myth: If I have the flu, taking antibiotics will help me get well faster.

Get the Facts: Antibiotics are not the answer to fast recovery when it comes to the flu. Antibiotics can cure most bacterial infections; however, viral infections, such as H1N1 or other strains of the flu, cannot be cured with antibiotics.

The best way to limit flu infection is by getting a vaccine. Other preventive measures, such as covering coughs or sneezes and washing your hands, can also help prevent illness.

Myth: Wearing a facemask or respirator can reduce my chance of seasonal or H1N1 flu infection.

Get the Facts: There is little evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of wearing facemasks and respirators to prevent the spread of seasonal or H1N1 flu right now. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is beneficial to use a facemask or respirator when consistently exposed to a severely ill person, such as a primary caregiver who is at high-risk for complications and is caring for someone with the flu. It is also recommended that a sick person, who can tolerate wearing a mask, do so around others to help decrease the spread of the illness.

For more information, check out the CDC's recommendation for facemask or respirator use at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm.

Myth: The flu vaccine doesn't really work and can make me sick.

Get the facts: The flu vaccine is almost 100% effective, and does not cause the flu. The most common flu vaccine is a one-shot injection administered annually. It is recommended that people get a vaccination beginning in September or as soon as a vaccine is available. Currently, manufacturers are developing the H1N1 vaccine, which is likely to be available sometime in Fall 2009.

Some people may experience soreness at the vaccination spot, and in a few cases, may develop fever, muscle aches, or feel unwell for a day or two. In very rare cases when a person is allergic to the vaccine, there may be an immediate reaction.

The flu vaccine is made from an inactivated virus, so a person cannot get the flu from a shot.
