

## Seasonal flu

There is usually a seasonal outbreak of influenza (flu) in the UK each winter.

There are three types of virus (A, B and C) and each winter it is a different strain.

This year one of the strains is H1N1 (also known as swine flu), a particular type of influenza A virus which seems to affect children and young adults more commonly than those aged over 60.

Flu can cause serious illness and death, especially in the very young and the elderly.

## Seasonal flu is a highly infectious illness

Notes

### Membership and Patient Advice & Liaison Service (M-PALS)

If you require information, support or advice about our services, you can contact the M-PALS office on the ground floor of the hospital just behind the main reception.

Alternatively, you can feedback your comments/suggestions on one of our comment cards, available at the M-PALS office or on a feedback form on our website [www.chelwest.nhs.uk](http://www.chelwest.nhs.uk).

We value your opinion and invite you to provide us with feedback of the service you received via the Patient Experience Tracker (PET). Please ask your nurse for more information.

T: 020 3315 6727

E: [m-pals@chelwest.nhs.uk](mailto:m-pals@chelwest.nhs.uk)

### Contacts for patients needing to register with a GP

- NHS Hammersmith and Fulham: 0800 358 9092
- NHS Kensington and Chelsea: 020 8962 4547
- NHS Wandsworth: 020 8335 1330
- NHS Westminster: 0800 587 8818

### Chelsea and Westminster Hospital

369 Fulham Road  
London, SW10 9NH

T: 020 8746 8000

W: [www.chelwest.nhs.uk](http://www.chelwest.nhs.uk)

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## Seasonal flu

### Advice for patients, visitors and staff

Choose  
**Chelsea and  
Westminster**

Chelsea and Westminster Hospital **NHS**  
NHS Foundation Trust

## How is flu spread?

The flu virus is spread in small droplets of saliva coughed or sneezed into the air by an infected person. 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.

## What are the symptoms?

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

- unusual tiredness
- headache
- runny nose
- sore throat
- shortness of breath or cough
- loss of appetite
- aching muscles
- diarrhoea and/or vomiting

**For most people, swine flu is a mild illness.**

## 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. Try to avoid all unnecessary contact with others during this infectious period.

A cough and general tiredness may last for 2–3 weeks.

## What is the treatment?

Most flu-like symptoms can be managed at home with your own immune system clearing the virus.

Some over-the-counter remedies can be taken but please read the label to ensure that children can take it and speak to the pharmacist for advice. For example, paracetamol and/or ibuprofen lowers temperatures and eases aches and pains.

**Under 16s must not take aspirin or any medicines containing aspirin.**

The need to take bed rest for 3–4 days is not uncommon as the virus can make you feel very weak. Ensure that you drink plenty of fluids while you are recovering.

## When should I seek medical attention?

Seek advice from your GP if any of the following applies to you:

- your symptoms have lasted for longer than a week
- you have a medical condition that is making your flu worse
- your symptoms have got much worse or you have developed other symptoms that are not typical of seasonal flu such as:
  - rash that does not fade when pressed
  - stiff neck
  - headache that becomes worse and worse despite taking painkillers
  - dislike of bright lights
  - drowsiness
  - confusion
  - repeated vomiting
  - chest pains
  - coughing up blood or bloodstained sputum

Also seek advice from your GP if a baby or young child is feeding poorly and is drowsy, unresponsive and floppy.

**The A&E Department at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital is open 24/7 if you REALLY need us.**

## Antiviral medication

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

## Pregnant women

In pregnancy, the immune system is naturally suppressed (but still functions) which means that pregnant women are more likely to catch flu and, if they do catch it, they are more likely to develop complications. However, the risk of complications is very small.

Most pregnant women only experience mild symptoms. If you are pregnant and you contract swine flu, the symptoms would be similar to those of regular flu listed above—these are more likely to happen in the second and third trimester. Seek advice early.

It is important to be prepared. If you are pregnant you will be offered the flu vaccination this year.

## Flu vaccine

Current statistics show that very few of those people who have died from flu this year were vaccinated.

If you are eligible for the vaccine (check with your GP), the advice from the Department of Health is to have it, as it is the best way to protect yourself against flu.

All staff at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital are being offered the vaccination.

## Prevention—good hygiene

You can help to reduce the spread of the flu virus by:

- ensuring that you wash your hands regularly with soap and water
- cleaning surfaces regularly to get rid of germs
- using tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- putting used tissues in a bin as soon as possible



**CATCH IT**



**BIN IT**



**KILL IT**

## Further advice

- **NHS Direct:** Includes an online flu symptom checker and advice on whether you need further medical advice—visit [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) and click on the *Colds and Flu* link or call 0845 4647 to speak directly with a medical adviser
- **Directgov:** UK government website with information about swine flu treatment and further advice—visit [www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu](http://www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu)