



By **Dr Ellie Cannon**

Severe cases of flu are crippling the NHS with an estimated 800 intensive care beds being occupied by sufferers. Chances are that you or a member of your family have suffered from it, or will do, but you may feel frustrated if you cannot get through to your doctor and need guidance. Here are all the facts you need to know, starting with the latest statistics from the Health Protection Agency, the national disease surveillance organisation.

- The highest rates of flu have been among those aged one to four.
  - The second-highest rates are among those aged between 15 and 44.
  - Most fatalities have been aged between five and 65.
  - More than a third of deaths have not been in high-risk groups.
  - Nearly all of those who died had not been immunised.
- Here we guide you through the different types of flu, how to avoid it, and how to deal with the symptoms if you do catch it.

**What is the difference between a cold, flu and swine flu?**  
A cold is a mild illness caused by a respiratory virus that generally causes sneezing, a cough, a sore throat and a runny nose. It lasts for a short time and causes no complications.

Flu is a more serious illness caused by a different group of viruses (the influenza viruses). The symptoms are muscle pain, marked tiredness, sweating, shivering, fever and congestion. Chest complications are common in those with chest or heart disease. Flu can be caused by a number of different influenza viruses and swine flu is one of these. Swine flu causes diarrhoea and very high temperatures, more so than other flu.

**If I've had the flu jab, am I covered for swine flu?**

Yes. The seasonal flu vaccine this year contains three strains of influenza virus including swine flu.

**If I've already had flu, is it still worth me having the jab?**

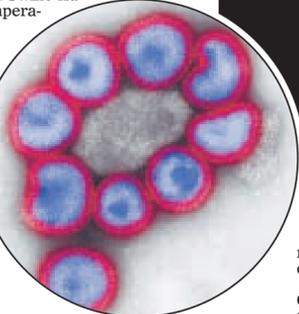
If in a high risk group then it is definitely worth it. It may be you have had flu caused by a different strain of influenza virus and the vaccination can offer you protection from other strains, including swine flu.

**How can a 'healthy' person suddenly die of swine flu?**

They will have died from pneumonia and respiratory failure. It is important to remember that every year people die from flu. Dr Rob Winter, president of the Intensive Care Society, has said that the majority of those seriously ill are pregnant, have underlying conditions or are overweight.

**Can I be a carrier of the virus without having symptoms?**

We have seen people test positive for swine flu who have shown very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. This means you can infect others without showing any symptoms yourself. This is not really being a carrier – we call this a sub-clinical infection.



**CONTAGIOUS:** Flu virus particles

**Does the flu virus react differently in each of us?**

Yes. All infections cause a spectrum of symptoms ranging from mild to severe and it is hard to predict how we will react. As well as background health, factors including how many virus particles the body takes on – known as viral load – are important.

**What medicine should I take if I have flu?**

Healthy adults should take 1g paracetamol (usually two tablets) every six hours. In addition, you can take 400mg ibuprofen every eight hours. It is safe to take the two together.

**How can I get Tamiflu, and will it work if I already have flu?**

Tamiflu is being prescribed in cer-

# Got the **FLU** but can't reach your doctor? Here's ALL you need to know

tain situations for high risk patients under strict national guidelines. It can work to diminish symptoms and infectiousness even once flu has started. It is most effective in the first 72 hours of the illness.

**Can I get it prescribed privately?**

Yes, and it is approved for adults and children over 12 months of age. It is not suitable for women who are pregnant or nursing.

**How does it work?**

It is an anti-viral and attacks the virus and stops it from spreading inside your body. It will not reduce symptoms but will reduce the length of time you have flu.

**When should I take it?**

Only under the guidance of a doctor. It causes unpleasant side effects (usually vomiting) and should be taken only when there is an absolute medical indication. It should never be taken 'just in case' or preventatively.

**When should we call a doctor?**

Anyone in one of the high risk

groups who has not been vaccinated should call the doctor immediately if you suspect swine flu.

**What are the red flag signs for calling a doctor if not high risk?**

Red flag signs are breathlessness, a fever that is not going down, or reduced urination. It is important to remember lethargy is normal with flu – but drowsiness is not.

**What is a fever?**

Body temperature of between 36.5C and 37.2C is normal but a fever is 38C and upwards. In children under five, a fever is a temperature above 37.5C.

**I can't get through to a doctor, NHS direct is always busy and my symptoms are worsening. Should I go to A&E?**

If you are in a high risk group or are experiencing any of the red flag symptoms mentioned above, then you should go. If your flu is continuing with no red flag signs, ask a friend or family member to go to the surgery to get advice for you or book a telephone consultation.

**Are there symptoms we should watch out for in our children?**

Dehydration is important so watch for poor drinking and little urine output. Do not worry about appetite which is not a good indicator. Warning signs of severe illness include fast breathing and a fever not reducing with medicine.

**When am I contagious?**

You are most infectious/contagious soon after developing symptoms. You can continue to spread the virus, by sneezing, for up to five days. You become less infectious as symptoms subside, and once symptoms are gone, no longer considered infectious.

**Can flu be carried on/in food?**

There is no research to suggest swine flu can be carried on or in food, including pork products. Contaminated objects can transfer the virus so basic hygiene is important when handling everything, including food.

**How long can flu germs exist on a surface?**

Up to 48 hours, depending on the temperature and humidity. Flu



**AGONISING:** Pippa Kelly is now back on her feet, but is still feeling the effects of her illness

**My £4,500 tum**  
Why more men are turning to liposuction  
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**Going potty**  
Can creams save our skin from the rigours of winter?  
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**I felt I'd been run over by a steamroller**

*PIPPA KELLY is a housewife in her 40s. She lives in Berkshire with husband Matt and two children Alex, seven, and Freddie, five.*

Usually the days leading up to Christmas are spent dashing around, tidying the house and wrapping last-minute presents. This year I spent the Thursday before Christmas in bed with a raging temperature, agonisingly sore throat, hacking cough and exhaustion so crushing I felt as though I'd been run over by a steamroller.

As a mother, you get used to being resilient and I can't remember the last time I took to my bed. On this occasion, I could hardly lift my head from the pillow and I slept for 18 hours.

I started to feel ill at a drinks party the previous weekend, coughing and feeling a bit hot. As my five-year-old was off colour, I ended up at the doctor on Wednesday morning when I mentioned my increasingly sore throat. 'It's a virus,' said my GP, and pointed out that there's nothing you can really take for flu. Naively, I assumed the worst was over. By the afternoon I had the children in front of the telly while I lay on the sofa wondering what had hit me.

I'm glad I went to the doctor's then as I would have had to be carried had I gone over the next couple of days. I couldn't even look after my children. Fortunately a friend took them for a day and my husband had ten days off.

I took every painkiller available – Beechams strongest flu remedy as well as ibuprofen. I counted down the hours until the next dose. Luckily we had booked a restaurant for Christmas Day, by which point I was feeling a little better. I couldn't have cooked the turkey myself, and once we got home I fell asleep on the sofa again.

We were concerned about the children getting it, but my youngest has had similar symptoms over a few weeks and now I'm hoping my daughter won't contract it as school has started.

This flu halted me in my tracks for two weeks. I didn't drive for ten days and even the odd glass of wine I drank gave me a crashing headache, as though I'd drunk an entire bottle. Even now I know that if I do too much over the next couple of days I'll collapse again.

I wouldn't wish this flu on anyone.

● Epidemiology expert Dr Douglas Fleming, of the Royal College of General Practitioners Research and Surveillance Centre, Birmingham, says: 'Most cases this year have been H1 influenza or influenza B viruses, which tend to affect children and younger adults more, although we do not know why. Similar to last year, it seems the elderly are least affected, which shows vaccination works.'

'The majority of those infected will be in the healthy population, which is why there seem to be a large number of deaths in this group. However, proportionally, the biggest number of deaths are still in the high-risk groups.'

viruses survive longer on surfaces than cold viruses.

**Should I be putting my dishwasher on at a higher temperature?**

No. Washing with any detergent and water is enough to remove virus particles.

**And the washing machine?**

Flu viruses cannot survive on clothes for long and washing at normal temperatures is sufficient to remove them.

**Can I transmit it to others via my skin or clothes?**

It does seem to be more contagious than other flu illnesses with more people getting

ill from any one contact. Coughing and sneezing creates an aerosol of virus that spreads up to a metre and infection is also possible from contaminated hard surfaces such as door handles rather than clothes. Keep hands clean and there should be no virus to transmit.

**Should we avoid crowded places such as swimming pools and cinemas?**

No. It is important to keep a sense of proportion. We are not in the midst of a swine flu pandemic and the vast majority of people will not be seriously ill with it. Flu is prevalent every winter and crowded public places are a breeding ground for all infections.

## Remember the 20-second hand-washing rule



- We all know to wash hands regularly, but it is crucial to wash them after sneezing and coughing when they get covered in virus particles.
- Use disposable tissues rather than a handkerchief.
- Do not refill your cup from a communal water machine and avoid the cup to touch the tap.
- Stay off work when you are ill. And likewise, keep your children off school.

- Use disposable paper towels to dry your hands in public toilets.
- Washing hands for 20 seconds is more important than using antibacterial soap that has not been proven to be any more effective at killing germs than normal soap.
- Keep hands away from your mouth and eyes unless freshly washed. Shaking hands with someone and then biting your nails or rubbing your eyes is an easy way to pick up the virus.



**FEVER REMEDY:** Parsley tea

## Grandma's parsley

There are many home remedies to ease flu-like symptoms that are surprisingly effective and inexpensive. Here, CHERRY CHAPPELL reveals three simple ideas that may offer much-needed relief.

**CHILLS**

Many a Scot will tell you that the very best remedy for chills is the traditional hot toddy. This recipe came from Anne Stobard, a medical herbalist from Devon.

Bruise a piece of root ginger and two

## tea and some other traditional remedies for colds and fever

teaspoons of caraway seed and place the mixture in a wide-necked jar with 1.2 pints of whisky, the grated zest and juice of a lemon and 8oz of large raisins. Seal and leave for three weeks, shaking the jar daily, then strain and rebottle.

As Anne explains: 'This toddy is said to cure everything from an impending cold to seasickness. However, because alcohol kills

off Vitamin C, which is needed to fight off a cold, you may benefit from a simpler version of fresh ginger (sliced), lemon juice, honey and cinnamon with boiling water poured on and stirred well.'

**COLDS**

This remedy appeared in a section of the Women's Institute magazine Home & Country headed Recipes and Ancient Remedies.

**Rosemary and cider**  
Boil a sprig of rosemary in half a pint of cider for 15 minutes and drink it at bedtime as hot as possible.

**FEVER**

**Parsley tea**  
Chop up a bunch of parsley and add it to a cup of water. Bring it to the boil in a saucepan, simmer for three minutes, strain and drink.

**Apple water**  
Thinly slice four unpeeled apples then boil them in a saucepan with a quart (2 pints/1.2 litres) of water and a little sugar until the slices become soft. Strain and take cold.

● **Grandma's Remedies: Traditional Treatments From Mustard Poultices To Rosehip Syrup**, by Cherry Chappell is published by Arrow Books, £7.99

## 5 of the best Vitamin C supplements

In 1970, Nobel Prize-winning chemist Linus Pauling published Vitamin C And The Common Cold, spawning the idea that taking large amounts of the vitamin can fortify the immune system, helping to reduce the duration and severity of the common cold, or even prevent them. Whether true or not – it is disputed – Vitamin C supplements are taken today for this reason by millions. Here are five options that may give you the boost you need.

**1 Pukka Organic Bio Nutrients Natural Vitamin C – 60 capsules, £13.95**

Natural Vitamin C derived from a blend of organic fruit extracts, including lemon and rosehips – one of the richest natural sources. Each serving provides 400 per cent RDA Vitamin C.  
[www.pukkaherbs.com](http://www.pukkaherbs.com)



**2 Pure XP Acerola C Elite – 100g, £39.99**

Acerola berries provide a naturally bio-available (easily absorbable) source of Vitamin C. Combined with melon-juice extract, it is rich in superoxide dismutase (SOD), another powerful antioxidant.  
[www.insideorganics.co.uk](http://www.insideorganics.co.uk)

**3 Nature's Plus Esterified Vitamin C – 90 tabs, £18.35**

Modified Vitamin C is gentle on the stomach and pH neutral, ideal for those who cannot tolerate traditional ascorbic acid (the chemical name for the vitamin). Contains no yeast, wheat, corn, soy or milk, salt or starch.  
[www.nutricentre.com](http://www.nutricentre.com)



**4 Biocare Vitasorb C Liquid – 15ml, £5.36**

A concentrated liquid form of the vitamin, which is easier to absorb. A few drops can be taken under the tongue or added to water, fruit juice or milk. Ideal for those who have difficulty swallowing capsules and tablets.  
[www.yourhealthfoodstore.co.uk](http://www.yourhealthfoodstore.co.uk)

**5 Boots Pharmaceuticals Vitamin C & Zinc – 20 effervescent tablets, £3.49**

Zinc works together with Vitamin C to help the normal function of the immune system. Orange flavoured. Dentists advise drinking this supplement through a straw to protect teeth from erosion.  
[www.boots.com](http://www.boots.com)

