

Have they the flu, or the common cold?

It does not seem to be winter without media frenzy at some stage, warning us of an impending flu epidemic. Managers can be forgiven if they feel that employees no longer suffer from a common cold. Everybody seems to have 'the flu' and this is considered to be much more severe.

We appreciate it is difficult for non medical managers and employees to determine whether their symptoms are severe or due to a mild cold. Even doctors get it wrong and the diagnosis of flu (influenza) is usually made with hindsight once a patient does not recover after 2-3 days or their temperature settles.

The initial symptoms are very similar, runny nose, temperature, aching joints. Often with a head cold, the symptoms are mainly as one would expect, in the nose and throat. Severe influenza can be particularly debilitating and typically involves significant joint and muscle pain and a fluctuating temperature.

Preventative Healthcare does advise the use of thermometers. Electronic thermometers are now cheap, freely available and easy to use. Once the temperature is beginning to settle, there is no reason why individuals cannot return to work.

Flu remains a significant problem for managers and employees. Every year, approximately 5% of a workforce experience flu symptoms, fortunately not all at the same time. Influenza is a typical winter illness that thrives best in cold, dry air. It migrates between the northern and southern hemispheres during their winter seasons. At the Equator, influenza has small peaks and troughs all through the year, but is strongest in the spring and autumn.

Another reason why flu tends to be more prevalent in winter months is due to the fact that we do not have the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time outside in fresh air and we tend to remain inside with other people. This allows individuals who are infected to sneeze and cough and transfer the virus.

How can I protect myself and my employees against the flu?

It is important to stress good personal hygiene, for example, regular hand washing and the drying of hands after they are washed. If family members have developed flu symptoms, it is as well to restrict personal contact, such as hugs and kisses.

In the 1980's and 1990's the jury was out with regards to the effectiveness of influenza vaccine, due to the fact that the vaccine did carry a number of side effects. Vaccine production has improved significantly and the number of side effects have significantly reduced. It is generally accepted that the influenza vaccine does have a significant impact on improving an individual's resistance against influenza infection.

Influenza infection normally lasts between 3 and 5 days. Once the temperature has settled, individuals may feel lethargic and weak; consideration should be given to encouraging a phased return to work, possibly one or two days working half time.

For further information with regards to immunisation or for individuals who do not bounce back as anticipated following flu infection, please do not hesitate to contact us at Preventative Healthcare. Please contact either Jane Puncher or Penny Lovelock at PHC for further assistance.

NEW CLINIC

PHC now has a new clinic at Luton, Beds

If you would like one of your employees seen at our new Luton venue, please

*Contact your PHC Contract Support Administrator who will make the
necessary arrangements.*