



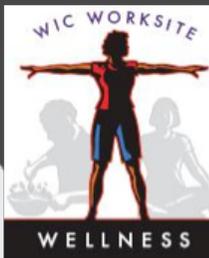
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# WIC Worksite Wellness Newsletter

## Protecting Yourself from Cold & Flu Season

**Now more than ever is the season to focus on optimizing your health**

**Just as apples are in season and pumpkins are reappearing at the supermarkets and farmers markets, cold and flu season has also arrived. The number of people coming down with the flu peaks in late October. From winter to early spring, about three times as many Americans experience the flu than do in other months of the year.**

No one likes getting sick, but most of us catch a cold or flu every once in a while (the average American experiences 2.5 colds each year.) While the flu and a cold can share some of the same symptoms (sniffing, snuffy nose, sore throat), there are some differences that can help you differentiate between the two. The flu usually, but not always, includes a fever, which may be accompanied by chills, aches and pains, headaches, and exhaustion—all of which are uncommon in a cold. Unfortunately, it also sticks around for longer—it can last up to three weeks.

Despite the name, colds are not caused by leaving the house with wet hair or not wearing enough clothing. Like the flu, colds are caused by viruses, but there are so many strains that creating an effective vaccine is extremely challenging.

A flu shot is the most obvious way to ward off the flu; there are other things you can do to reduce your risk of catching a cold. First, maintain a healthy diet and exercising regularly. Gargling with salt water also seems to reduce the chance of catching a cold, as does using anti-microbial cleansing agents. Echinacea may reduce incidence of colds, however, supplements such as Airborne do not prevent colds or the flu.

**Once you have the flu or a cold, what should you do?** Rest, drink plenty of fluids and keep tissues nearby. There are no real effective treatments for a cold; because it is caused by viruses, antibiotics are ineffective in curing it. A severe cold or the flu can be treated with antiviral medications. Over the counter medications may help lessen the severity of symptoms, but they won't shorten

the length of time you're sick. On the up side, colds generally last less than a week. If you do get the flu, stay at home for at least 24 hours after your fever passes to avoid getting your co-workers sick.

Eating yogurt or taking probiotics may reduce the duration and severity of a cold, but don't decrease the odds of catching one. Vitamin C may also may shorten the duration of a cold, but may not lessen the severity of your symptoms. However, stay away from mega doses of Vitamin C. As for the saying "feed a cold, starve a fever," there's no scientific evidence to support it. If you are hungry, you should eat.

Consider getting a flu shot and refer to the next section for more tips to keep the flu out of season.

**For more on this topic:**

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## Simple Wellness Steps to Avoiding the Cold & Flu

- 1. Get a flu shot.** You don't even have to visit the doctor to get one; they are now easily accessible at many pharmacies. This year they protect you against *three* different viruses.
- 2. Wash Your Hands.** Only 77% of Americans wash their hands before eating or handling food and only 39% report washing their hands after sneezing. Wash for at least 15 seconds or the time it takes to sing happy birthday. If no soap and water is available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- 3. Avoid others who are sick.** This one can be difficult, especially since people can be contagious a day before symptoms begin, not to mention that you don't want to offend anyone. If you know someone is sick, don't share food and be sure to wash your hands after contact.
- 4. Cover your nose when you sneeze.** Sneezing is one of the primary ways cold and flu viruses are spread.

## SEND US YOUR IDEAS & QUESTIONS



We want to know what worksite wellness ideas are working for your agency. We also want to hear your questions and concerns about implementing worksite wellness. Share your agency's successes and/or questions by emailing us at:

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