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**Fact Sheet:
About Colds and The Flu**

Colds and the flu are the most frequent infections across all American age groups. Caused by viruses, these illnesses occur year-round but especially during the “cold season” in winter when more people are forced to stay indoors, increasing the chances of spreading viruses from person to person.

What is known about the causes and extent of colds and flu in this country and what can be done to keep from getting sick with these viruses? The following statistics provide an up-to-date look at this common public health problem.

- In the course of a year, Americans suffer 1 billion colds. (SOURCE: the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)).
- Children have about 6 to 10 colds a year. One important reason why colds are so common in children is because they are often in close contact with each other in daycare centers and schools. In families with children in school, the number of colds per child can be as high as 12 a year. (SOURCE: NIAID).
- Adults average about 2 to 4 colds a year, although the range varies widely. Women, especially those aged 20 to 30 years, have more colds than men, possibly because of their closer contact with children. (SOURCE: NIAID).
- An estimated 10 to 20 percent of Americans come down with the flu each flu season, which typically lasts from November to March. Children are two to three times more likely than adults to get sick with the flu, and children frequently spread the virus to others. (SOURCE: NIAID).
- Although most people recover from the illness, more than 100,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die from the flu and its complications every year. (SOURCE: Center for Disease Control and Prevention).
- The economic impact of the common cold and flu is enormous. The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) estimates that, in 1996, 62 million cases of the common cold in the United States required medical attention or resulted in restricted activity. In 1996, colds caused 45 million days of restricted activity and

22 million days lost from school. (SOURCE: NCHS).

- In the United States, most colds occur during the winter. Beginning in late August or early September, the rate of colds increases slowly for a few weeks and remains high until March or April, when it declines. (SOURCE: NIAID).
- The opening of schools and exposure to cold weather increase the prevalence of colds and flu because most cold and flu viruses survive better when humidity is low in the colder months of the year. Cold weather may also make the inside lining of the nose drier and more vulnerable to viral infection. (SOURCE: NIAID).
- More than 200 different viruses are known to cause the symptoms of the common cold and approximately 10 to 15 percent of adult colds are caused by viruses also responsible for other, more severe illnesses. (SOURCE: NIAID).
- Some of the symptoms of the cold and flu are similar, but the two illnesses can usually be distinguished. Typically, colds begin slowly, two to three days after infection with the virus. The first symptoms are usually a scratchy, sore throat followed by sneezing, a runny nose and possibly, a cough several days later. Signs of the flu include sudden onset with a headache, dry cough and the chills and these symptoms quickly become more severe than those of a cold. Fever of up to 104 degrees Fahrenheit is also common. (SOURCE: U.S. Food and Drug Administration).
- Stress is factor that can increase the susceptibility to the common cold and the flu. This was shown in a study conducted at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg where test subjects injected with influenza A virus that reported greater psychological stress before inoculation experienced more severe symptoms. (SOURCE: NIAID)
- Those whose immune system is compromised are the most likely to contract a cold or the flu. Some of the factors that weaken the immune system are stress, lack of sleep, poor diet, lack of physical exercise, exposure to environmental toxins, and allergies. Health problems, such as raised blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels and diabetes, also play a role in lowering the body's defenses. (SOURCE: Complementary Medicine Magazine)
- Studies link the ability of interferon, a protein that is a component of the immune system, to kill many common cold and flu viruses. One therapy involves the one-time injection of the drug interferon alpha but this treatment may cause side effects, such as flu-like symptoms and nosebleeds. (SOURCE: FDA)

- A balanced diet containing fruits, vegetables and whole grains is important to keep the immune system functioning effectively. But many Americans have nutritionally deficient diets, which is why it is now possible to take supplements containing herbs that have immunoactive properties. This means the herbs work in combination to naturally increase the body's production of interferon, the protein that triggers the body's immune system to mount an immune response.

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