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Influenza Self-Care – Medication Guidelines

Guidelines for over-the-counter medications (non-prescription)

General guidelines

1. Follow the instructions on the label – Pay attention to when medication should **not** be used.
2. To prevent adverse reactions or taking extra medication not required, use an over-the-counter product that contains the least number of active ingredients required to treat your symptoms.
3. Try “regular strength” products before “extra strength” and only take the dose recommended.
4. If you are taking more than one medication at a time, check the labels to avoid taking the same ingredient twice.
5. Check the expiry date on medications in your home. Take outdated medications to a pharmacy for disposal.
6. Keep all medications out of the reach of children.



Guidelines for adults

For muscle pain and fever

Use acetaminophen (may be the best choice for some people) or ibuprofen. There are cautions with the use of both of these medications. Speak with a pharmacist or health care provider if you have any questions.

- **Note:** Acetaminophen, when taken in high doses or with other medication or alcohol, may affect the liver or kidneys and ibuprofen may irritate the stomach and cause fluid (water) retention.

For a cough

You may want to try a medication with dextromethorphan (DM) for a dry cough that prevents you from sleeping or causes chest discomfort.



For a stuffy nose

Try saline nose drops or sprays first.

- Nose drops or sprays act quickly and may cause fewer side effects than medications taken by mouth.
- These medications should only be used for two or three days because with longer use, nose stuffiness (congestion) can actually get worse.

Try a decongestant if saline nose drops or sprays don't work.

- Decongestants may cause side effects like rapid heartbeat and sleeping problems and should not be used in some cases.
- Speak with a pharmacist or health care provider and always read the label carefully before using a decongestant product.

For a sore throat

- If salt water gargles haven't worked, you may wish to try lozenges or throat sprays.
- Products with dyclonine will numb the throat while other products have a soothing effect.

Complementary medicines

Some people may wish to try complementary therapies such as herbal and homeopathic products.

- It is important to find out as much as possible about the product you are thinking of taking as some complementary products should not be used in certain situations.
- Consult with your pharmacist or healthcare provider before taking these products.

Guidelines for children

Children younger than six years of age

Health Canada recommends that over-the-counter cough and cold medications **should not be used** in (given to) children younger than six years of age.

- These products have not been shown to reduce symptoms in children.
- There have been reports of overdose, misuse and rare side effects.
- Some of the serious side effects reported include such symptoms as convulsions, increased heart rate, decreased level of awareness, unusual heart rhythms and hallucinations.
- Do not use vapor rub type products on children younger than two years of age.

Children six years of age and older

- Do not give children medications labeled only for use in adults and/or those that do not include instructions for children.
- Over-the-counter medications should only be considered if other measures have not worked.
- Talk to your pharmacist or health-care provider before using over-the-counter medications. They will help you to decide:
 - If an over-the-counter medication will lessen your child's symptoms;
 - If the medication is safe for your child to take.
- When using over-the-counter medications to treat children older than six years of age talk with your pharmacist or health care provider about:
 - How long the medication should be taken;

- The dosage;
- The possible side effects;
- When the product should not be used.
- Follow all the instructions carefully including the dosing and length-of-use directions.
- Use the medication dosing device, if one is included with the product, to ensure accurate dosing.
- Do not give more than one kind of cough or cold medication to children.