

# TAB Monthly Newsletter

A Newsletter for people living with COPD to help us connect with our peers

Flu Season Special Edition, 2018 Volume 2, Issue 12



When Allison or Tessa answer a TAB newsletter question they're both in the habit of including questions for us to answer. This time, Allison's questions were so timely, it seemed appropriate to create a Flu Season Special Edition, reminding us that we may be able to better prepare ourselves for the flu season.

First, be ready with your personal action plan and review it twice a year with your Health Care Provider.

**Here are her questions:** "Flu season is on its way, what is the flu and how is the flu different from a cold?" ---- "What are things you can do to help prevent the flu?" ---- "What are some steps you can take to help avoid a flare-up?"

**SO WHAT IS "THE FLU"?** The flu is a type of germ, called a **virus** that you breathe in. Viruses can get into the nose, throat, and lungs. It's also called influenza. **Antibiotic medication has no effect on a cold or flu.**

**ANTIBIOTICS** are used to treat an exacerbation caused by a **bacterial** infection as shown in your Action Plan.

Symptom	HOW IS THE FLU DIFFERENT FROM A COLD?		A COPD FLARE-UP/ EXACERBATION IS DIFFERENT THAN A COLD OR FLU
	Cold	Flu (Influenza)	
Fever	Rare	Usual, high fever (102°F/39°C), sudden onset, lasts 3-4 days	<b>The first step is to understand your "normal" shortness of breath and cough/sputum.</b>
Headache	Rare	Usual, can be severe	What usually makes you short of breath and has that changed? Any changes in your mood?
General aches and pains	Sometimes, mild	Usual, often severe	Are you taking more breaks than normal? Are you using more of your rescue inhaler?
Tired and weak	Sometimes, mild	Usual, may last 2-3 weeks or more	Are you having trouble coughing your sputum up when you usually don't have trouble?
Extreme fatigue	Unusual	Usual, early onset	Has the sputum changed colour? Has sputum thickness or stickiness increased?
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Common	Is there more sputum than there is usually? Are you coughing and wheezing more?
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes	Other less reliable signs – fever, decreased energy, swollen ankles, headache, runny nose, sore throat. Fatigued and generally unwell.
Sore throat	Common	Common	<b>Follow your Action Plan!</b>
Chest discomfort, coughing	Sometimes, mild to moderate	Usual, can be severe	Contact your healthcare provider; (Name & #) _____ if you have changes to either or both your breathlessness and/or your cough/sputum that has lasted about 1-2 days.
Complications	Can lead to sinus congestion or earache	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure; Can worsen a current chronic respiratory condition; Can be life threatening	<b>Do not wait! Get help! Why?</b> Waiting will allow, if it is an infection, to grow and spread thus making it more challenging to bounce back, also, waiting may increase the damage the flare-up has caused.
			What is the worst that could happen if you get help? Maybe it was an inconvenience to get help but if they tell you that you are not having a flare-up, you now have peace of mind. But you still must be vigilant about your body.

## WHERE IS YOUR ACTION PLAN?

### Ask your health-care provider for a personalized written COPD Action Plan.

Your Action Plan contains instructions or steps you should take at the first signs of an exacerbation. You will likely be instructed to take your short acting bronchodilator/rescue/reliever such as Salbutamol, every four hours. You may be told to call your health care provider or fill a prescription to have on hand for steroid pills and/or an antibiotic and instructed when to take them. These instructions may tell you when to call your health care provider or when to go to the emergency department. **It is very important to note that every patient is different and the plan must be created along with your healthcare provider.** [www.thoracic.org](http://www.thoracic.org)

## WHAT ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP PREVENT THE FLU?

- Getting a yearly influenza (“flu”) vaccine is still the best way to protect you and your family from influenza. If you need a flu vaccine, get it as soon as possible. It is best to get by October. If you are delayed, there is still value to get it anytime during the active flu season.
- Wash your hands often and well with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Any opening or breakage in your skin is a way the germs can get in – so to help reduce the chances of contracting this – avoid touching your face.
- Avoid being near people who are sick. Avoid contact with anyone known to have a fever or symptoms of the flu.
- Keep good control of medical problems, such as COPD.
- Keep your body healthy with diet and exercise.
- Try your best to cough/sneeze into your elbow – this avoids contact with your hands helping to reduce the spread.
- If you are having a fever and symptoms of the flu, ask your health care provider right away if you need to be treated with an antiviral medicine. Get immediate medical attention if you are having severe symptoms.

Healthcare Provider Contact Number: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT ARE SOME STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO HELP AVOID A COPD FLARE-UP?

### Can I prevent having an exacerbation/flare-up?

Not all exacerbations are preventable but.....

- Ask your health-care provider for a personalized written COPD Action Plan.
- Take all medications prescribed by your doctor. Ask for help if you are not sure how or when to take them or what they’re for.
- If you smoke, get help to quit.
- Avoid being around others with colds or flu.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink enough fluids to keep sputum thinner and easier to clear.
- Avoid triggers that can make your COPD worse, like air pollution, cigarette smoke and breathing very cold – or hot – or humid – air.
- Take good care of yourself – eat healthy foods, exercise regularly and get enough sleep. Staying healthy will help your body fight infections.
- Get your flu shot every year. Ask your healthcare provider if you need pneumonia shot.
- Wash your hands properly and often.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Many people catch colds, flu and other contagious lung infections from germs on their hands.
- Review inhaler technique. Review your Personal Action Plan with your Health Care Provider twice a year.

Reprinted from the COPD Flare-ups handout from The Lung Association [www.lung.ca/COPD](http://www.lung.ca/COPD)

*“When you can’t breathe, nothing else matters”*

Canadian Lung Association

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