

## The Flu & Warfarin

### Influenza

As a patient on warfarin (brand name Coumadin®), you are no more prone to getting the flu than people not taking warfarin. However, there are some facts about the flu to keep in mind.

Each year, influenza (the flu) arrives in the fall and lingers until late spring. The flu is caused by a specific strain of virus that changes from year to year and affects between 5% and 20% of the population. Symptoms can range from mild to severe, resulting in the hospitalization of ~200,000 each year. An average of 36,000 people die annually from flu-related symptoms.<sup>1</sup>

### Do you have the flu or a cold?

It is sometimes hard to tell the difference. The flu often causes: high fever, extreme fatigue, body aches and diarrhea.<sup>1</sup> Only your doctor can determine whether you have a cold or the flu. Report any health changes to your doctor or nurse. More frequent testing is recommended as an increase in INR may be expected with an illness. Elevated INR levels increase your risk of prolonged bleeding.<sup>2</sup>

### Preventing the flu

The Center for Disease Control & Prevention recommends people wash their hands frequently with soap and water. Higher risk groups, 65 years and older, asthma, diabetes, heart and neurological disease, are encouraged to get an annual flu shot.<sup>1</sup>

The flu vaccine may result in a short-term elevation in INR test results but it should not discourage you from being vaccinated.

### Special considerations

If you get the flu, your appetite may be decreased and your fluid intake might be affected. These changes may temporarily affect your INR test results. Many cold and flu medications can interact with warfarin.<sup>2</sup> Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a list of over-the-counter medications safe to take while taking warfarin. Holistic, herbal and homeopathic medicines should be approved by your doctor before using.<sup>2</sup>

For more information on how to stay healthy,  
visit **www.PTINR.com** or call **1-877-262-4669**



WellLife: A guide for living on warfarin  
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1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Seasonal Influenza. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/disease.htm>
2. Wittkowsky, Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. Medication Guide for Coumadin Tablets and Coumadin for Injection (Package Insert). Princeton, NJ. 2009.