**Melanie Cole, MS (Host):** If you’ve ever had a cold or the flu, you know how crappy they can make you feel. And the dizzying array of over the counter medications can be so confusing. Here to tell us about cold and flu is Dr. Jill Powell. She’s a primary care physician with Memorial Health System. Dr. Powell, what’s the difference between allergies, a cold, and the flu? How can we tell the difference?

**Jill Powell, DO (Guest):** Sometimes it’s really hard to tell the difference between them. Typically, with a cold and with influenza, you feel sick. Particularly with influenza you usually have a high fever and a cough and body aches, and you just feel really terrible. A cold is usually slightly less severe symptoms. You may have a fever, you may not have a fever, but you also generally don’t feel well. With allergies, you tend to have nasal congestion and sometimes a cough, but you don’t usually run a fever and you don’t really feel sick with allergies.

**Host:** Is all year cold and flu season? What time of the year do you see a spike in them?

**Dr. Powell:** Most of the time cold and flu season is more in the winter months, in the fall and in the winter when people are home and they are not getting out like what they do the rest of the year. When people come in during the summer and say they have their summer cold, a lot of times that it more allergy related.

**Host:** That’s interesting. If somebody comes to you, a lot of people ask for an antibiotic. Because they think oh, I've got green stuff going on or you know, but it’s not antibiotic worthy, is it?

**Dr. Powell:** No. An antibiotic would be if you have a bacterial infection, and that would need to be determined by your doctor. So, if you see your doctor and your doctor says this is a cold, this is a virus, this is influenza, an antibiotic is not going to help you get better any quicker. So, you should not ask for an antibiotic because it’s just going to make antibiotic resistance worse and it’s not going to help you get better.

**Host:** Before we talk about some of those over the counter medications and treatments and self-care, how would you characterize this year’s flu season? Tell us about the vaccination and who should be vaccinated.

**Dr. Powell:** The flu season really hasn’t gotten underway this year. A lot of times we don’t see a peak in influenza until later months such as in February and March. I'm still encouraging people to get their flu vaccine if they have not had it yet. As far as who should get the influenza vaccine, the recommendations are anyone who is above six months of age should receive the influenza vaccine.

**Host:** What do we do about the people that are either immunocompromised or too young to get the vaccine. How can we best protect them?

**Dr. Powell:** You can best protect those people by getting the flu vaccine yourself. People will often say I never get sick, I don’t need to get the flu shot. I will counter and say, but what about your newborn granddaughter. She is too young to have the influenza vaccine. Or your elderly grandmother. What if she were to get influenza? It could be deadly for those people. So, everyone should get the flu vaccine if they are able to and there’s no contraindications to help protect others from getting influenza.

**Host:** Dr. Powell as I said in the intro, there are so many over the counter medications for headaches, body aches, fever, and flu like symptoms. Tell us what you like and what you don’t want us to be using, and especially with kids because now some of the pseudoephedrine products are behind the counter. So, tell us about some of these home treatments and things that we can do.

**Dr. Powell:** So, a medicine called Mucinex or guaifenesin is the generic name. It’s probably safe for most everyone to take. It will not raise your blood pressure. It will help thin the mucus so maybe it will be easier to cough up any mucus that you may have. If you have high blood pressure, you do need to be cautious with medicines that have decongestants in them because it can raise your blood pressure. So, you need to check with your doctor if it’s okay for you to take that medication. With children, I really don’t recommend that children take any type cold medication until they are at least 4 years of age. Maybe even closure to 6. The potential side effects that you can get from these medicines just really aren’t worth it in children. So, in children I recommend that you suck out their nose. That you run a vaporizer and you just give them supportive care to make them feel better.

**Host:** Does steam work? You mentioned a vaporizer. Do you like a hot vaporizer or cool mist?

**Dr. Powell:** I am a fan of the steam vaporizer because you can put something like a liquid Vicks VapoRub which will put some mentholated steam in your room, and it really does help decrease cough and help with snotty noses. Now you do have to be cautious with small children that they don’t put their fingers in the steam. That they could burn themselves. But really that is my preference and what I have in my own home.

**Host:** What about things like nasal lavage, Dr. Powell. I mean wrestling a kid to try to put a nasal lavage on them is not exactly easy, but for adults, it can help clear out the sinuses can't it?

**Dr. Powell:** Yes, it absolutely can. So basically, you are washing the mucus out of the nose. If you do that several times a day and get your nose cleaned out, then you can certainly feel better than if your nose is all stuffed up. That is a non-drug treatment that might help you feel better.

**Host:** What about some of the products on the market like vitamin C and zinc or probiotics airborne. Do any of these help to stave off an oncoming cold if you feel a sore throat coming on? What do you think about these?

**Dr. Powell:** Honestly, probably not. They're not going to be harmful to take, but I haven’t seen much good research that says that they actually do much of anything.

**Host:** Give us your best advice about prevention of cold and flu. We’ve mentioned vaccine, but is there really any way to prevent the common cold?

**Dr. Powell:** Hand washing and staying home when you're sick. If you are not out exposing other people, then less people are going to get sick. If you are out, then make sure that you wash your hands. Try not to chew on your fingers and your fingernails and put your fingers in your eyes.

**Host:** Dr. Powell, another question that many parents have when a child has a cold or the flu is the fever. Should we be trying to bring a fever down? When do you advise somebody see a doctor if they do have a cold or the flu?

**Dr. Powell:** So, if you have a really small infant that’s under four months of age, any time this child has a fever it does need to be evaluated by a physician. An older child, you do not have to give a child a medicine to bring down their fever. The only reason that I recommend that you bring down a fever is if the child is uncomfortable and to bring the fever down would just make them feel better. Because it is miserable to have a fever. A fever is the body’s natural response to raise the body temperature to help fight the infection. So, fever is actually a good thing and you don’t necessarily have to treat it.

**Host:** That’s great advice and wrap it up with your very best advice about cold and this year’s flu season and what you think we can expect, and what you want people to know about the importance of handwashing and good cold and flu treatment.

**Dr. Powell:** Stay home if you're sick, wash your hands frequently, and get the flu vaccine.

**Host:** Thank you so much for joining us. You're listening to Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System. For more information, please visit mhsystem.org. That’s mgsystem.org. This is Melanie Cole. Thanks so much for listening.