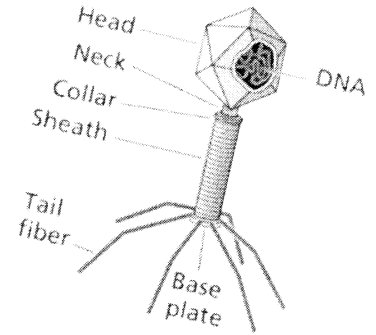


VIRUS



Viruses are nonliving capsules that have no cells and store genetic material inside the capsule. They are extremely small (they are very tiny, much smaller than bacteria) visible only with electron microscopes. They are often shaped like helices, spheres and other similar shapes. Diseases commonly caused by viruses include colds, influenza (the flu), polio, AIDS, West Nile virus, STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) and more.

The most common viral diseases are transmitted (spread) through the air, on surfaces, and by contact with infected persons. Influenza is a dangerous disease that kills thousands of people worldwide every year. Other serious viral diseases include AIDS and West Nile virus. Today, more than 40 million people live with AIDS; 3 million die from the disease each year. The HIV virus that causes AIDS is spread when infected blood or body fluids enter another person's body. The West Nile virus is carried by mosquitoes and infects birds as well as humans. The disease can cause inflammation to the brain and spinal cord.

Viruses are like hijackers. They invade living, normal cells and use those cells to multiply and produce other viruses like themselves. This eventually kills the cells, which can make you sick.

Viral infections are hard to treat because viruses live inside your body's cells. They are "protected" from medicines, which usually move through your bloodstream. Antibiotics do not work for viral infections. There are a few antiviral medicines available. The best method for prevention of viruses is *vaccines*. Keep these tips (that apply to MORE than the flu) in mind.

FLU PREVENTION TIPS

