



INFLUENZA IS NOT JUST A COLD

It is also much more than a stomach bug. In fact influenza known as the flu is a serious lung infection. Every year 36,000 deaths and 200,000 hospital stays are due to the flu in the United States.

Those at high risk for flu are children aged 6-59 months, pregnant women, persons aged >50 years, and those with certain chronic medical conditions. The above-mentioned people and those who live with or take care of high-risk persons should be vaccinated against the flu.

The flu season in the United States is from November to February. The vaccine is usually available the first part of October every year. The vaccine is manufactured based on what the virus looked like the year before. The flu virus changes from year to year in an attempt to survive. This is similar to the way bacteria become resistant to antibiotics in an attempt to survive. This natural drift in the virus explains why some years many people are severely infected with the flu despite getting the flu shot. The match between the vaccine and the actual strain of flu determines how serious the flu season will be each year.

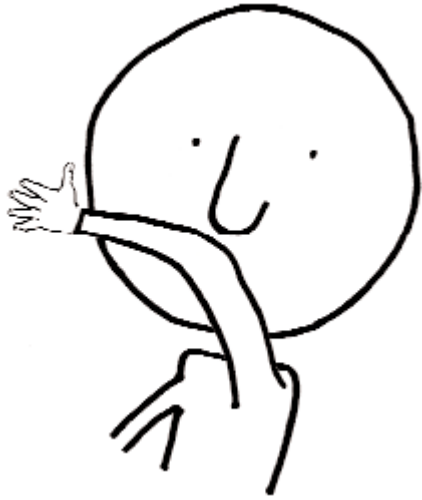
Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, tiredness, muscle aches, and headaches. Unfortunately young children who are major sources for the spread of the flu may not have the classic symptoms. You begin spreading the flu 24 hours before you develop symptoms, and you may continue to shed the virus for up to seven days. Once you have been exposed to the flu virus you may develop symptoms 1-3 days later, this is known as the incubation period.

The flu is highly contagious, and is spread by direct contact and droplets (from sneezing and coughing). The best ways to prevent contracting the flu are 1) Avoidance (frequent thorough hand washing with soap and water, and using a mask), 2) Vaccination and 3) Antiviral medications if you cannot be vaccinated or you have exposure before you can be vaccinated. Do not depend on the use of antiviral medications; remember like bacteria viruses can be resistant to the medicines available. The antiviral medicines must be started within 48 hours of the start of symptoms and even then the course of the flu is shortened by two days, but hopefully the symptoms will be much milder.



So why is there all this concern with the flu? After all it just sounds like any other cold! Wrong! Remember up to 36,000 people die yearly from the complications associated with the flu. The main victims are the young and the elderly. The major complication is pneumonia caused by bacteria due to the weakened respiratory tract. Remember you must start the antiviral medication within 48 hours of the start of symptoms. So during the flu season the old adage of waiting 7-10 days before seeking medical care is not useful.

How does your doctor decide if the symptoms you have is the flu or a common cold? The health department keeps weekly records of the activity of influenza virus in the community. During the early part of the typical flu season cultures are usually done to prove the infection is influenza, later in the season when the flu is wide spread in the community your doctor will most likely diagnose you with the flu. It is based on the likelihood of you having been in contact with the flu virus.



REMEMBER WASH THOSE HANDS DO NOT DEPEND ON HAND
SANITIZER TYPE PRODUCTS!!!

**COVER YOUR MOUTH WITH
YOUR ARM AND NOT YOUR
HANDS!**