

What You Need to Know About This Severe Flu Season

This year's flu season could be severe, according to the Centers for Disease Control, so we should all do what we can to avoid getting it.

If, however, you fall victim to the flu, it's important to contact your doctor because there are things that can help.

The flu season lasts through April. Dr. Michael Jhung, a medical officer with the CDC's influenza division, said most people who should be vaccinated have not done so.

"We're not even halfway through the flu season," he said. "It's certainly not too late to get vaccinated."

Unfortunately, one of the most virulent strains of the flu, H3N2, is not in this year's flu vaccine. That's because it takes months to manufacture the vaccine, and the H3N2 became widespread after the flu vaccine was already in production and it was too late to include the H3N2 strain.

Nevertheless, there are still other flu strains circulating in America that are covered in the flu vaccine. Doctors estimate the vaccine is about 50 percent effective this flu season.

So the bottom line is: Even if you have gotten your flu shot, you should not enjoy a false sense of security. We should all be extremely vigilant in our efforts to protect ourselves and our loved ones against the flu.

However, if we fail at protecting ourselves against getting the flu, with the advent of highly effective flu anti-viral medications, if you or a loved one gets the flu, call your doctor immediately. It's important to make that call as soon as possible because in order for the anti-viral medications to

work, they must be administered within 48 hours of the development of symptoms.

These anti-virals can be life-saving for people at high-risk for developing fatal complications from the flu include the elderly, young children, and people with chronic medical conditions such as cancer, heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, arthritis and HIV/AIDS.

Clean Your Hands

The best way to prevent getting the flu is to keep your hands clean. Washing hands is the best way to do that, but it's important to wash your hands thoroughly. Use warm water and lather for 20 seconds, or about the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.

If you are not able to wash your hands, hand sanitizer is an adequate substitute. Just make sure it contains at least 60 percent alcohol. More is better.

Remember to clean your hands before touching anything that will enter your mouth. That includes all food. Not just meals, but snacks.

Avoid Touching Your Mouth, Nose, Eyes

Furthermore, refrain from putting your uncleansed fingers on your lips or in your mouth, nose and eyes. This is a tough one for those of us who wear contacts and eye makeup. We have to remember to clean our hands before we rub our eyes or the germs on our hands can enter the body.

Beware of Surfaces

Beware of surfaces that are touched by a lot of people, such as door knobs, refrigerator handles and remotes. Germs can live on hard surfaces for up to 72 hours.

By all means, do not share cups, glasses and utensils with

other people.

5 Ways to Strengthen Your Defenses

You can strengthen your immunity—your body's ability to fight off infection—by taking some sensible precautions.

1. First, make sure to get plenty of rest. Eight hours or more per night will go a long way to protecting you and your family against sickness this flu season. While we sleep, our bodies repair themselves. Conversely, when we're sleep deprived, our resistance is low and we are more susceptible to illness.

2. Drink plenty of water. This flushes out any toxins that might wish to remain in our body and keeps our organs functioning properly. Stay away from other types of liquids if possible, such as sugary sodas and fruit juices, caffeine and alcohol, which all hinder good health.

3. Speaking of sweets, stay away from sugar too. Time and again, too much sugar has been proven to weaken the immune system.

4. Reduce stress. Stress also wreaks havoc on your immune system. So make sure to destress by exercising, praying and spending time reading God's Word, as well as practicing all the admonitions not to worry.

5. Finally, get all the vitamins required to stay healthy this winter. Load up on fruits high in anti-oxidants and vitamin C, such as berries.

Better yet, every day eat as many low-glycemic vegetables (not the starchy ones like potatoes and peas) as you can, such as green, leafy ones like kale and broccoli.

Supplements are a great idea because most of us don't get all the vitamins and minerals we need from our diet. Vitamin D, a good multi-vitamin (I take Damage Control Master Formula and love it because it's very comprehensive) fish oil, coconut oil and a probiotic.

It's worth the time and effort required to prevent getting sick. According to the CDC, last year there were 109 flu-related deaths in kids, and 171 in the 2012-13 season.

The CDC does not compile similar data for flu-related deaths in adults because it's too difficult to trace, as the flu is usually the precursor to a condition that kills.

For instance, many of the deaths from pneumonia actually started with the flu. That said, it's estimated that deaths stemming from the flu number into the tens of thousands each year, mostly among the elderly.

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