

Health Hints

Healthy Habits To Stay Flu Free

(NAPS)—There can be an easy way to avoid the flu, which each year infects about 20 percent of the population, resulting in some 200,000 hospitalizations. What's more, flu can be deadly. About 36,000 people die annually from complications caused by flu viruses. It doesn't have to be that way.

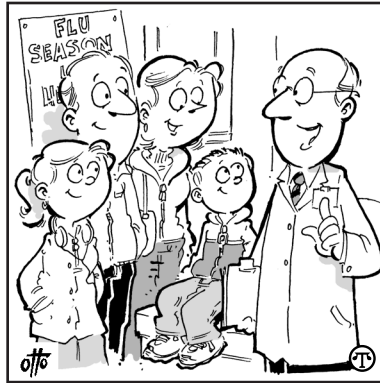
"The easiest way to prevent infection is to get vaccinated," said Vincenza Snow, M.D., FACP, director of clinical programs and quality of care at the American College of Physicians (ACP). "This will help to protect you and your loved ones against flu."

ACP recommends that most adults over the age of 50 and anyone who has a serious long-term health problem, such as asthma or diabetes, get an annual flu vaccination. If they haven't already, adults should contact their internist to get immunized. Children between the ages of 6 months and 18 years who do not have a serious egg allergy should also be vaccinated.

Flu activity can start as early as December and flu cases usually peak during January and February. However, flu viruses circulate into the summer so vaccination can take place through March and still be very effective. Protection develops about two weeks after immunization and may last up to a year.

ACP also recommends that physicians and other health care professionals get immunized.

"Flu vaccination of health care workers results in improved patient safety, improved employee safety and decreased health care expenditures," said Dr. Snow. "It also sets a good example for patients."



Adults over the age of 50 should get an annual flu shot.

It is possible to get the flu even if you are vaccinated, but immunized people often have a milder case.

Additional Prevention

- Wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitizers regularly, especially after shaking hands.
- Use anti-bacterial wipes or sprays to clean doorknobs, remote controls and your workstation.
- Use a humidifier or saline spray to keep nasal passages moist.
- Keep your immune system strong by exercising regularly and getting plenty of sleep.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes with your hands, which are constantly picking up germs.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

To learn more about flu vaccination, visit ACP's Web site, www.acponline.org. ACP, the nation's largest medical specialty society, is an organization of more than 126,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists and medical students.

Healthy Ideas

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