

Staying Healthy During Flu Season

It seems like no one can stay healthy during this time of year. Everyone's got a sniffle or a cough, or worse ... the dreaded flu bug! These viruses have evolved over the years to be highly resistant to many of our efforts to contain them. *“Currently the seasonal influenza virus activity is low in Cumberland County. The cases of flu generally peak in February and March and can last through May.”* Lisa C. RN, Infection Preventionist, Cumberland Medical Center.

It may seem like we're powerless to prevent the spread of disease. Though we can't prevent it, we can help lower the risk of spreading it around. Here are some tips you can use to beat the flu this year!

1.) Wash your hands

This is the best and easiest way to help prevent the spread of infectious disease. Your hands are the most likely means for spreading disease. You touch something with the virus on it, then touch your eyes, nose or food. Next thing you know, you're coughing up a storm.

Regular hand-washing is the first line of defense. Not only should you wash your hands after using the bathroom, but also before meals and after any contact with someone who might be ill. If you work at a job that includes a lot of public contact, take regular hand washing breaks as your job allows. Scrub firmly for 20 seconds with soap and warm water.

If you can't get to soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Be warned that using this too much can dry your hands, leading to cracks in the skin and greater risk of disease.

That's why it is wise to accompany your sanitizing with a good moisturizing lotion.

2.) Practice good self-care

Your immune system is just like the rest of your body. It takes energy to keep your body free of disease. That's energy you won't have if you're not sleeping or eating well.

Getting a good night's sleep is important year-round, but it's especially important when it comes to preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Also, a diet rich in vitamin C can help keep your immune system in good shape. Citrus is an obvious choice, but leafy greens, like kale, also contain tons of the stuff.

3.) DAB – destroy all bacteria

If you've been on social media in the last year, you may have noticed a craze called “dabbing.” Started by professional athletes, this pose involves tucking your nose into the inside of your elbow. It may be a little goofy-looking, but it has a fortunate, but unintended, consequence. It's the most sanitary way to cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough.

Covering your mouth with your hands doesn't do as much as you might think. You're going to touch other things with your hands. Your elbow, though, doesn't see nearly as much contact. You can also get more complete coverage of the bits of fluid that escape when you cough or sneeze.

4.) Practice self-quarantine

If there's a rule for disease prevention that's more important than anything else, it's this: If you're sick, stay home. If your child is sick, they need to stay home. Nobody likes missing a day of work or school, but the alternative means an even more widespread illness. Staying home will also give you the time and rest you require to recover more quickly, leading to more productive time when you return.

You don't do your best work when you're sick, and neither does anyone else. If you're running a fever, wait at least 24 hours after the fever has broken before returning to work. There's nothing brave or heroic about "toughing it out" and getting a bunch of other people sick in the process. If you can't stay home, at least take steps to prevent disease from spreading. Avoid prolonged or close contact with anyone. Wash your hands and avoid touching things that other people regularly touch. Warn others that you're feeling sick so they can keep a safe distance.

5.) Avoid crowds

You might be practicing the best hygiene habits in the world, but you can't do much to control the habits of others. Wherever many people gather, disease will tend to follow. As much as possible, avoid concerts, conventions and crowded public spaces during this time of year. Be aware that people who are traveling from afar may have different strains of the same bugs. Any time people gather from multiple communities, the chances of infection go up. If you're entertaining or traveling, double down on good hygiene habits!

6.) "The most important step to preventing the flu is to get vaccinated every year. In 2015-2016 the flu vaccine prevented an estimated 5 million illnesses and approximately 71,000 hospitalizations. The CDC estimates since 2010 there have up to 56,000 deaths attributed to the influenza virus.

The flu can be a very serious illness for the very young and adults older than 65. Influenza can cause complication in people that already suffer from chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes or congestive heart failure. Children younger than 5, particularly those younger than 2, often require medical care or hospitalization. Other people at high risk for complications related to the flu are pregnant women and those with a compromised immune system, such as those with cancer.

The flu typically starts suddenly. Signs and symptoms include: fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache and fatigue. You may experience some or all of these.

You may still get the flu even if you were vaccinated, however, your symptoms will be much less severe and recovery time will be faster. "Lisa C. RN, Infection Preventionist, Cumberland Medical Center

SOURCES:

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