



News Notes

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4 Flu Season Etiquette Tips to Keep You (And Everyone Else) Healthy

Get your flu shot this year.



Because you don't have time for the flu

Getting a flu shot is always a good idea. But this year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, it's even more important. Why? Because you want to protect yourself from having the flu virus (influenza) and the coronavirus at the same time. And it'll help keep you out of the hospital — and keeping hospitals from being overwhelmed with patients who have the flu, COVID-19 and other illnesses is crucial.

Flu season normally lasts from October until May, peaking between December and February. The flu is extremely contagious and can be dangerous for some.

However, there are things you can do to prevent the spread of the flu. Here are four of them:

1. Get a flu shot now

Getting a flu shot is the best thing you can do to avoid getting the flu.

Flu shots not only help you stay healthy, they help others too. The flu vaccine creates “herd immunity,” where those who receive the shot prevent the spread of the virus, thus protecting those who can't get vaccinated for medical reasons.

A flu shot is necessary every year to protect against the flu virus as it changes.

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“There’s a lot of false information circulating about the flu shot, the biggest one being that it gives you the flu. It’s just not true,” says Stacey Cummings, MD, a pediatrician at Geisinger Pediatrics in Danville. “The vaccine you receive is a dead form of the flu virus, based on which strains are supposed to be the most common this season. It takes two weeks to become effective. If you do develop flu-like symptoms after getting your flu shot, they should last less than three days. If you develop the flu, it just means you got sick before the vaccine had enough time to take effect.”

2. Keep your hands to yourself

Wash your hands throughout the day, especially before eating. Be conscious of what you touch and wipe down surfaces that collect lots of germs, such as keyboards, doorknobs and phones. Most importantly, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

3. Watch where you sneeze

Sneezing is a highway for germs. When someone sneezes on a plane, in the office or at home, the germs are thrown into the air, and anyone who breathes them in can be infected. So can anyone who touches where they land.

The best way to avoid infecting others is by sneezing into the crook of your elbow. This helps keep germs trapped somewhere other people likely won’t touch.

4. Stay home when you’re sick

“The flu shares some common symptoms with your average cold virus, so it’s easy to shrug it off as just another cold and go about your business. If you’re experiencing any flu symptoms, such as a fever, chills, muscle aches and sinus congestion, stay home. Don’t go to work, school or any place you might infect others,” says Dr. Cummings.

For more helpful flu tips, visit geisinger.org/flu.

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