

Flu Season Is Right Around The Corner; Are You Informed?

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The Center of Disease Control (CDC) is continuously analyzing information or data about influenza disease and its activity in the United States. This year's flu season seems to have the attention of the H1N1 virus, better known as the swine flu. With the public's uncertainty, much of the focus surrounds its origin and how the virus is spread. The swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus. Pigs can be infected by both avian influenza (bird) genes and human influenza, causing variations of viruses to emerge. At this time there are four main influenza type A virus subtypes that have been isolated in pigs: H1N1, H1N2, H3N2, and H3N1. The most recently isolated is of course the H1N1 virus.

The CDC has determined the H1N1 virus to be contagious and is spreading from human to human. The H1N1 virus is thought to spread the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Mainly from person to person through coughing and sneezing. Signs and symptoms of the H1N1 virus include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches, chills and fatigue. Due to the public concern and alarm created in the daily reports of the swine flu, it appears the Emergency Rooms are being overwhelmed with visits. Please refer to your family physician if you exhibit any signs or symptoms of the flu.

The viruses change from year to year. Through research, every year scientists try to predict which strains (types) will be a positive match to the virus to cause illness and create immunity. If the strains are well matched, the vaccine can reduce the chance of getting the flu by 70-90%. The effectiveness of the flu vaccine depends on at least a couple things; the age and health of the individual and the match of the strain.

As we know with the seasonal flu vaccine, the targeted populations are healthcare workers, people 65 and older and children between 6-59 months. The CDC has recommended guideline changes for the swine flu vaccine. Anyone aged over 6 months and under 65 are now the suggested target population. The CDC recommends vaccinating children 6 months to 18 years for both seasonal and swine flu viruses and young adults 19-24 for the H1N1. The recommended changes also discussed prioritizing the vaccination of adults aged 34-39. Of course healthcare workers will remain a targeted group, but the final priority group are those aged 65 and over.

Prevention and Control

In addition to offering both the seasonal and swine flu vaccinations, the following infection control measures will be enforced not only in the healthcare industry but in companies, schools and universities, and places of business. These measures will include; education, observation of respiratory illness, Influenza testing, use of antiviral prophylaxis, respiratory hygiene, standard precautions, droplet precautions, and isolation or restriction of suspicion of virus.

Remember that adults can spread influenza from one day before getting symptoms to approximately five days after symptoms start. Young children and people with compromised immune systems may be infectious for 10 or more days after the onset of symptoms.

Please make all attempts to stay informed of the upcoming flu season and the availability of the vaccine based on priority and the revised CDC guidelines. If you have any questions, please contact your family physician for direction.