

5 things you can do right now to ward off the flu by Jaimie Oh

It's that time of year again: We're bracing ourselves for the flu peak, and many physicians are anticipating the worst flu season in a long time.

Influenza, commonly called the flu, is a seasonal disease that usually begins in the fall and often peaks around January. Pharmaceutical companies develop a flu vaccine every year, but the challenging aspect of the flu is that the disease is always changing.

In fact, some reports suggest this year's flu vaccine appears to be only around 10 percent effective, which is why we can expect a more severe flu season.

While the flu is a tricky disease, we have a good enough understanding of it to minimize our risk of catching and spreading it. Here are five things you can do right now to ward off the influenza virus:

1. **Get vaccinated!** Even though this year's vaccine may not be as effective as hoped, it still holds protective power compared to not being vaccinated at all. In addition, even if the vaccine doesn't prevent you from getting sick, it still may make your symptoms milder. And it's not too late to get the shot!
2. **Wash your hands.** A person sick with the flu can spread the disease through droplets, which are released into the air any time that person sneezes or coughs. These droplets can stay on our skin, clothes or everyday surfaces, so keep those hands clean! Washing with alcohol foams or gels or using soap and water are both effective to prevent spreading the virus.
3. **Keep your germs to yourself.** Another tricky feature of the flu virus is that you can be infected but not show any symptoms for 4-5 days. Keep your droplets, or germs, to yourself by sneezing or coughing into your elbow.
4. **Feeling sick? Stay home.** Watch for the classic symptoms of the flu: fever of 100.5 degrees or more, chills, body aches, cough and sore throat. Encourage sick coworkers or friends to stay home to prevent the spread of the virus.
5. **See a health care professional.** If your symptoms worsen significantly within the first 48 hours, or if you are at high risk for complications, see your doctor. Those at high risk include adults 65 years of age and older, pregnant women and women up to two weeks postpartum, residents of nursing homes or other long-term care facilities, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, children younger than 5 years of age and those with serious chronic diseases. There are treatments available that can speed up the recovery process.

Wishing you joy and good health,
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