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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Just what is “The Flu” and How to Avoid It!**

*By Mary Ruppert, RN, BSN*

First, let's review what “The Flu” isn't. The Flu isn't the bug that causes nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea is usually caused by a different type of virus (not an influenza) and, while it is called a stomach “flu” is isn't a flu at all. Viral gastroenteritis, an infection that results in nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, is caused by a variety of viruses (like Norovirus). In the US the viruses that cause stomach and bowel upsets are more common during the cooler months – the same time that the “Flu” is active.

True Influenza (Flu) is a contagious respiratory illness, caused by an influenza virus. Flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at it worst, can lead to death. True Flu is different from a cold, usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, may occur but are more common in children than adults

**Anyone Can Get the True Flu, but the Disease Is More Severe for Some People**

Most people who get Flu will recover in a few days to less than 2 weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications (like pneumonia). Millions of people in the United States get the Flu each year. More than 200,000 people are hospitalized every year due to Flu complications; 20,000 of those hospitalized are children younger than 5 years old and every year about 36,000 people die from Flu.

**How To Know if You Have the Flu**

Your respiratory illness might be Flu if you have:

- sudden onset of body aches
- high fever
- respiratory symptoms

- your illness occurs during the usual flu season

### **The CDC Says “Take 3” Steps To Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones From The Flu**

#### **1. Take the time to get a Flu shot**

- While there are many different Flu viruses, the annual vaccine protects against the 3 major Flu strains expected to cause the worst illness this Flu season.
- The vaccine can protect you from getting sick or, if you do get sick from a different strain, can make your illness milder.

#### **2. Take everyday preventive action.**

- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or elbow
- If you use a tissue throw it right away and clean your hands immediately
- Clean your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleanser
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get the Flu, the CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them

#### **3. Take Flu antiviral drugs, if your doctor prescribes them**

- If you are diagnosed with “The Flu”, antiviral drugs may make your illness milder and prevent serious complications. This may be especially important for people at high risk for complications.
- Antiviral drugs, when prescribed, work best when started within 2 days of starting to feel sick. Check with your Physician to see if antiviral medication might help you get better faster.

If you have any topics that you would like to see discussed in this column please call Maryanne at (603) 747-9189 or email [maldrich@cottagehospital.org](mailto:maldrich@cottagehospital.org)

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