

How to avoid catching the flu



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For those among us unlucky enough to be vulnerable to such things, seasonal changes can mean sickness is inevitable. The cold weather in particular can leave the best of us with minor ailments such as colds and sore throats. Health experts say that a rise or fall in temperature can distract our immune systems from their task of protecting our well-being. More cases are seen during the winter months because the heat – which is a natural protector against influenza and kills most viruses – has gone away. Secondly, the air is dryer and this thins the lining of the nose and mouth making you more prone to illnesses.

In many countries, influenza is one of the biggest causes of short-term illness. Commonly known as flu, it is most prevalent during the winter months in the northern hemisphere, while most cases increase between April and September in the southern hemisphere. Symptoms include sore throat, fever, headache, fatigue, runny nose, muscular aches and

sometimes diarrhoea and vomiting.

Flu can affect anyone, but children under 5, people aged 65 and over and pregnant women are at greater risk. Those with existing conditions such as diabetes or obesity, respiratory problems such as asthma, heart diseases, chronic illnesses or kidney or liver problems often have a weaker immune system, so they are also in a high-risk group. These groups can experience far more severe symptoms such as pneumonia, ear infections, asthma attacks and even heart failure as a result of influenza.

Some people living in hot climates may assume that they will avoid the flu, however it is a global virus that affects everybody. Excessive air conditioning, poor ventilation and a multicultural and ever-changing population who bring viruses from their home countries all contribute to the spread of the virus.

So what is the best way to avoid flu?

The main things people can do to help themselves include drinking plenty of fluids, getting enough sleep and washing hands regularly. Having a good diet is also key, with foods rich in zinc such as beef, wheat germ, pumpkin seeds and spinach, great quality protein such as eggs, lentils, salmon and taking an antioxidant supplement.

Having said that, studies have shown that getting a flu injection will also help to substantially reduce the risk of catching it. Not all flu viruses will be preventable however, and the level of protection may vary between people so it's not a 100% guarantee that you'll be flu-free. Nevertheless, if you do catch it, the virus is likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been.

In November, Saudi Arabia launched a Kingdom-wide vaccination campaign

against seasonal flu. The vaccination is suitable for people of all age groups including pregnant women, patients suffering chronic diseases such as diabetes, renal problems, heart and lung disease, and health officials. Speaking at a conference recently, Saudi Arabia's Health Minister Adel Fakeih urged health workers in the public and private sectors to help people take precautionary measures against flu through vaccination. Saudi Arabia is currently offering flu jabs in all government hospitals and nearly 2000 primary health-care centres for free. School children are also being vaccinated.

In the UK flu shots are also offered by many employers to reduce lost working hours. Flu is one of the biggest causes of short-term illnesses and can harm business through the number of sick days taken, particularly at the end of the year when winter arrives and flu is more prevalent.

Here at Durbin we offer our staff free vaccinations against flu – it benefits them and us as sickness leave is reduced and the spread of the illness is minimised. MCH

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