Flu Frenzy or Just Another Illness

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The Student Health and Wellness Center offers influenza vaccines for the students at USU. Is it worth taking the time and the minimal pain involved to get the vaccine? Can it have an impact on your life and those you love?

Taken from the Interim estimates of 2018-19 seasonal influenza vaccination; Influenza A (types HINI and H3N2) encompassed 95% of influenza last year, whereas influenza B cases came in at 5% of illnesses. This last flu season was the longest in the past 10 years, lasting 21 weeks. The CDC reports that in the US there were 42.9 million people infected with influenza in the United States during the 2018-19 flu season. Of those infected, 531,000-647,000 were hospitalized and 36,400 to 61,200 died. The risk is the highest in people 65 and older and younger children.

“Influenza is a viral illness which typically presents as cough, fever, chill, body aches, and may also include significant nasal secretions and sore throat. Severe cases may result in death,” said Dr. J. Dave Malouf, DO, Family Medicine Physician from USU Student Health- “The only preventative measures that we have are the influenza vaccine, handwashing, and avoiding ill people.”

There is never an optimal time to be ill, but most students that are diagnosed with influenza have several days that they are contagious. They also have moderate to severe symptoms that may limit concentration and their ability to attend classes and do their course work. Most patients recover in about 2 weeks and do not require medical attention. There are antiviral medications (oseltamivir, peramivir, zanamivir, and baloxavir) that have mixed evidence of effectiveness in treatment of influenza, but can possibly help in decreasing symptoms and shortening the course of the illness (by less than a day). These medications are most effective if taken within 48 hours at first onset of symptoms.

The CDC government website confirms that the flu vaccine aids in overall public health. Last year the flu vaccine was 61% effective against all flu types in ages 6 months to 17 years old and 24% effective in people 50 and older. The vaccine has helped to prevent 7.1 million illnesses, 109,000 hospitalizations, and 8,000 deaths. Flu season usually lasts from October to May. Last year, flu activity increased in November and peaked in mid-February, then went below baseline in mid-April. The optimal time to get the flu vaccine is by the end of October, but can still be beneficial later in the season. Antibodies only take 2 weeks after vaccination to help protect the body against influenza.

There are differing flu shots based on age, including both standard as well as high doses for people over 65. The Bear River Health Department offers higher dose flu shots for those 65 and older. Students that want a flu shot can drop into the Student Health Clinic, but can also call to make an appointment or schedule online. For employees, there are flu clinics offered on campus and they can also go to the Bear River Health Department or to a pharmacy for their flu shot.

Most insurance companies cover the flu shot. At the Student Health Center the flu shot is $20, but insurance companies can be billed. The insurance companies that have good coverage at the Student Health Center are PEHP, United Healthcare, United Health Care Student Resources, EMI, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and AETNA.
Receiving the flu shot in our student and staff populations, along with other preventative measures, such as handwashing and avoiding those that are ill, helps to build a community of wellness and improves the lives within our college community.

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