

Flu season lurks around the corner

by Cathy Long
Contributing Writer
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Flu can be a dangerous sickness, even be deadly for some people.

True influenza is a respiratory illness although people often talking about having “stomach flu,” which is often a gastrointestinal sickness.

Although most people who get the flu will recover without medical treatment within a couple of weeks, people in high-risk groups may become extremely ill.

High-risk groups include adults over 65, children under five but especially those under two, pregnant women, anyone with a weakened immune system (such as a cancer or HIV patient), diabetics, people with disabilities, people with heart disease or respiratory disease (such as asthma), and people who are extremely overweight.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the governmental organization responsible for public health in America, symptoms of flu include fever, fatigue, body or muscle aches, coughing, sore throat, headache and congestion.

Flu is highly contagious. Although symptoms usually strike rapidly, a person may be infected with flu and not yet realize it, so it is important to take precautions during flu season.

One of the easiest precautions is the wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water. If you cannot wash your hands with soap and water, use a sanitizing gel. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

If you are sick, stay home.

Among the best defenses against flu is to get a flu shot. The vaccine can also be delivered in a nasal spray.

Each year, researchers predict which strains of the disease are the most likely to infect people and vaccines are developed to fight those particular strains. Researchers must take their “best guess” at what the most common strain of flu will be because of the lead time required to produce the vaccine.

A common misconception that people have about the vaccine is that they contract the sickness after receiving the vaccine. People may get a different strain of flu, or may already be infected without realizing it when they receive the vaccine.

Getting vaccinated can provide some protection even if the strain of flu is different than what was predicted when production of the vaccine must start.

Scott Lenhart, Stokes County Health Department Director, said that the department is offering two flu clinics, on Fri. Oct. 7 and on Fri., Oct. 21, from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Stokes Family Health Center in Danbury. People who cannot come to one of the clinics can call the department and make an appointment to get a shot.

In addition, the department is coordinating with the school system to visit each school in Stokes County and provide shots.

Lenhart said that last year, the health department had to dispose of many doses of vaccine because people did not come to get a shot and encouraged residents to come to a clinic, make an appointment, or get a shot some other way.

Shots are also available at physicians' offices and many drugstores.

If you are unlucky enough to get the flu, antiviral drugs may ease the symptoms but it is important to call your doctor as soon as possible as the medications are most effective when taken in the very early days of sickness.