

Let the flu fly by: oregano and drinking fountains

By Kamyar Hedayat, M.D.

The flu is getting a lot of press these days, so it is worth taking a few minutes to consider what you can do to reduce your risk of getting this uncomfortable, and sometimes deadly, virus that infects children and adults between October and May. If you get unlucky and get the flu, it is also important to know when to stay home, when to treat yourself, and when to see your doctor.

Stay healthy with a wholesome diet. Include seasonal fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants, vitamins A and C, like pomegranates, kiwi, oranges and squash. Eat locally grown honey, and drink plenty of fluids. Oregano, marjoram and Echinacea are good infection fighters.

The flu is spread in two ways. The first is by someone sneezing or coughing it into the air. Don't stand too close to people with flu-like symptoms. If you have the flu, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or even your shirt sleeve and wash your hands right away. People with the flu can spread it one day before they feel ill and for 5 days after getting sick. If you work with patients, children, or the elderly, don't go to work when you have the flu.

The second way is by touching something that someone with the flu sneezed on or touched. Keep a bottle of gel-sanitizer on hand and wash your hands often. Recent studies suggest that elementary school drinking fountains have more germs than the toilet seats. Consider having your children drink bottled water or pre-packaged milk or juice during flu season.

You may be able to prevent the flu by getting the flu vaccine ("shot"). Children between 6 and 23 months, and children over 2 years with heart or lung problems (including asthma), diabetes and other long-term illnesses should get immunized and can receive the early flu shot. Children living in group homes or shelters should also get the shot. Everyone else can get the flu shot after October 26th. People between 5 and 50 might be eligible for a nasal spray vaccine instead of the shot. Ask your doctor if you qualify. You might have some mild flu symptoms after getting the shot and there are other viruses that cause flu-like symptoms so you can still get sick even if you have been immunized.

Influenza can have a range of symptoms including: (high) fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, queasy stomach, throwing up, or diarrhea. Usually people have many symptoms at the same time.

The two biggest signs to look for when you have the flu are dehydration and breathing problems. Fever, upset stomach and diarrhea can cause dehydration. Signs of dehydration can include sunken eyes, dry and cracked lips, and not wetting the diaper frequently. Be sure to give your child plenty to drink including broths. Chamomile, peppermint and ginger tea are good for upset stomach and diarrhea. Children tend to have more trouble breathing from bronchitis and pneumonia caused by the flu or asthma reactivation. If your child shows signs of dehydration or difficulty breathing, you should see your pediatrician or family doctor immediately.

There is no sure way to prevent the flu, but there are plenty of ways to reduce your risk of catching it or spreading it those you love (or don't!). Eat well, rest, and keep your hands clean so you'll have plenty of time for all of autumn and winter's pleasures.

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