

THE FLU AND YOU

I wanted to give you the latest information from the Center for Disease Control regarding this year's flu season and vaccine administration. The CDC is strongly recommending that you get your regular flu vaccination as early as possible.

As you know, the pharmaceutical companies are still developing the H1N1 vaccine. It has been determined that a one-dose vaccine is sufficient for immunity and takes effect 10 days after immunization. At this writing the CDC expects to have the H1N1 shot available in mid-October. The shots will initially be rationed and the priority groups are pregnant women, caregivers and family members with a child under 6 months of age, healthcare personnel, then children from 6 months to 18 yrs, then young adults ages 19-24 yrs of age, then adults ages 25 to 64 who have health conditions associated with a higher risk of medical complications from influenza. People 65 and older do not need the H1N1 shot because they do not seem to contract the virus.

The Chester County Health Department instructed us in late June not to have patients with suspected flu come in to the office to be treated. The symptoms we're looking for are the same as the regular flu: sudden onset of fever greater than 100.4 degrees and a sore throat and/or cough, body wide muscle aches and possibly vomiting and diarrhea.

The treatment plan is to prescribe antiviral medications ONLY IF they have a risk factor for developing complications from the flu or they are currently moderately-to-severely ill.

We advise them to stay home until at least 7 days AFTER their symptoms began OR until they have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.

We will instruct them on respiratory hygiene, cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing and wash their hands frequently. The new method of covering your mouth is to cough or sneeze into your elbow area or forearm. That way your hands don't spread everything around! Dispose of tissues properly after one use. Wipe down any commonly used items in the household, such as the remote controls, doorknobs, toilet flushing handles, refrigerator handles, etc. with disinfectant wipes, Lysol or alcohol. Open windows are helpful, weather permitting. Of course, no kissing or sharing of glassware or silverware. Shaking hands is not a good idea either.

We will be offering our patients symptomatic treatment such as Tylenol for the fever or Ibuprofen for fever accompanied by body aches. Drink plenty of fluids and rest. Over the counter remedies for the cough and sore throat are fine, but if you are confused by the wide array of products out there, call your doctor or pharmacist. These questions are not an annoyance, they are what we/they are getting paid for! You should have a family member or neighbor shop for you (REMEMBER, YOU HAVE TO STAY HOME).

Good luck out there. It's going to be an interesting Fall and Winter!

Submitted by Bonnie Hunter, LPN