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Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at Colburn Group.

Influenza

Facts about the flu

Most people experience several bouts with influenza, or the flu, several times in their lifetime. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, five to 20 percent of the United States population gets the flu each year and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized as a result of complications from the illness. These complications include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections and dehydration. The flu can also worsen conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma and diabetes.

Influenza

The flu is an infection of the respiratory tract that is caused by the influenza virus. It is spread mainly through airborne transmission, unlike the common cold, which is spread by direct contact. This

means that when a person who has the flu sneezes, coughs or even speaks, he/she is filling the air with microscopic droplets that are filled with flu particles. These droplets are small enough to remain in the air long enough to be inhaled by another person, and once they land in the new host, they begin reproducing rapidly.

Sometimes you can become infected with the flu by touching something that has the flu virus on it and then touching your nose or mouth. In addition, a healthy adult can infect others one day prior to having flu symptoms and up to five days after becoming ill. In other words, you can transmit the flu to others before you know that you have it yourself.

So, why do we remain susceptible to the flu year after year? The influenza virus is coated with proteins that change constantly. This gradual change in the virus, called an antigenic drift, renders it unrecognizable to our immune systems, and makes it possible for us to be susceptible to influenza every

year. In addition, entirely new subtypes of the virus appear from time to time.

Flu Symptoms

Flu symptoms are often confused with those of the common cold, when in reality the symptoms of the two conditions are quite different. Influenza is most often associated with the sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, cough and sore throat. If flu symptoms persist for more than three to four days, medical attention is recommended since they can lead to a more serious condition.

Prevention

The flu vaccine, or the flu shot, is your best chance of preventing the illness, and it can help to lessen the severity



of the flu if you do get it. Anyone who wants to lower their chances of acquiring the flu virus can and should get the flu shot. In addition, people who have an increased risk of getting the flu and experiencing serious complications from it should be vaccinated each year, including:

- People over age sixty-five
- Nursing home patients
- People over six months old with health problems
- Children and teenagers who take aspirin regularly
- People who have close contact with the elderly or those with health problems
- People with weakened or compromised immune systems

The best time to receive the flu vaccine is from October through mid-November. Influenza season runs from November until April, and peaks from December through March.

Other Precautions

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay away from others when you feel under the weather.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.

- Wash your hands often to protect against germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth in case your hands are contaminated with the illness.
- Get plenty of sleep, stay physically active, manage your stress and eat a nutritious diet to help your body fight off disease.

Did you know...?

During the last century three major flu epidemics occurred. These epidemics, during 1918, 1957 and 1968, resulted in over 600,000 deaths combined.