

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

February 24, 2011

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.

Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

Tina Girvin, U of F PharmD Candidate

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

Seasonal Flu Vaccinations: This Late in the Season?

Every year around October the signs and posters start showing up in the doctors' offices, pharmacies, other health care facilities, and public buildings advertising flu prevention and seasonal flu vaccines. So, here it is towards the end of the 2010-2011 flu season. You haven't gotten your annual shot yet?! Here are some reasons why it may still be a good idea.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu illnesses usually hit their highest numbers in January or February most years. But it can occur as late as May. Influenza can be a serious and costly illness involving lost time at school or work, more time in the hospital, pneumonia, and death. Recently, the CDC upgraded their recommendation: "all people over the age of 6 months old should get an annual vaccine".

People infected with the flu may be able to infect others a day before their symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick. This means you may be able to spread the flu to someone else before you even know you are sick, and after you "feel better". Young children, people who are severely ill, and those with severely weakened immune systems may infect others even longer.

Children under the age of 5 are at an increased risk of severe flu illnesses. Most at risk however are children younger than 6 months old. But they are too young to get the flu vaccine. The best way to protect these infants is for everyone to be vaccinated who comes in contact with children. That includes mom and out-of-home caregivers.

If you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant, changes in your immune

system, heart, and lung functions make you more likely to get seriously ill from the flu. This may be dangerous to the fetus. It increases the chance for serious problems such as premature labor and delivery. Pregnant women who get the flu can be at higher risk of hospitalization, and even death. Not only is the vaccine safe during pregnancy it can also help protect the baby for up to 6 months after birth.

Other people at risk for severe flu illnesses include those over the age of 50, people with certain chronic conditions, residents of nursing homes or other types of long-term care facilities, and those planning to travel since flu season varies by area. While the vaccine may not reduce the rate of getting the flu 100%, studies show that doctor's visits, hospitalization, and pneumonia due to the flu are greatly reduced.

In general, being vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself and your family and to stop the spread of the illness to others. Even if you got vaccinated last year, the type of virus changes every year, and your protection from last year does decline over time. Other prevention tips include: covering your mouth and nose if you cough or sneeze, washing your hands often, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Bottom Line: It is not too late to take an active role in reducing unnecessary flu infections, costs, and complications. Protect yourself and your family. Get vaccinated today!

However, if you do "catch" the flu, one study did find that eating chicken soup can decrease the length and severity of cold and flu symptoms. So, grandma wasn't that far off after all.

Here's a Florida version of chicken soup, with plenty of added Vitamin C for an extra fast recovery. Use brown rice for more fiber and vitamins. I hope you enjoy it!

Lemony Chicken Rice Soup

4 cans low sodium chicken broth	½ cup dry rice (regular or quick)
2 eggs	3 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
½ tsp grated fresh lemon peel	1 fresh lemon optional

Combine broth and rice in large saucepan. Cover and simmer until rice is tender. Beat eggs and lemon juice together in medium bowl. Pour 2 cups of boiling broth from pot very slowly into eggs, stirring slowly but constantly. Add egg mixture and lemon peel to saucepan with rice. Reheat to very hot but do not boil. Serve immediately, with a thin slice of fresh lemon for garnish. Serves 6-8.