

# SEE YOUR DOCTOR

## How To Keep From Getting The Flu: Expert Offers Alternatives To Vaccine

(NAPSA)—With this season's flu vaccine shortage, many Americans may be left wondering what other options they have to help stave off flu. Each year, 35 to 50 million Americans come down with the flu and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized each year because of flu-related illnesses, according to a recent study\*.

While vaccine is the first line of defense, according to Dr. Donald Perlman, assistant clinical professor at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), there are steps that can be taken to help decrease chances of getting the flu. They are:

- **Ask Your Doctor About Antivirals.** Prescription antiviral medications like Tamiflu can be particularly effective in preventing the spread of flu within a household or office when a family member or coworker is infected. Tamiflu must be taken within two days of exposure.

"It is important for the public to know that prescription antiviral medications can play an important role in the prevention and treatment of influenza," said Dr. Perlman.

- **Monitor the Flu in Your Area.** To keep informed of when the flu is hitting your area, log on to [www.flustar.com](http://www.flustar.com). FluSTAR™ (System for Tracking and Reporting Flu) provides geographical updates twice-weekly on incidence of flu on a regional and nationwide basis. Anyone can enter their zip code on the easy-to-use site to see the number of people with flu in their area, along with other information.



**Due to a nationwide shortage of flu vaccine, people are advised to speak with their doctors about other treatments, such as antiviral medications like Tamiflu.**

- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, and keep hands clean.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth; to prevent, wash hands often for twenty seconds with warm, soapy water. Also, avoid using antibacterial soaps, which do nothing to block viruses and, many experts believe, may encourage the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

- **Keep your immune system healthy.** Get plenty of sleep and maintain a healthy diet, including lots of fruits and vegetables, yogurt and water.

If you think you have the flu, Dr. Perlman suggests:

- **See Your Doctor.** At the first sign of flu symptoms, such as the sudden onset of profound weakness and body aches and pains accompanied by chills, fever and cough, see your doctor. Early diag-

nosis and treatment can help lessen the time you are sick.

- **Stay Home.** Be considerate of others. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick to prevent spreading the flu.

- **Practice Respiratory Etiquette.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

- **Don't Smoke.** Statistics show that heavy smokers get more severe colds and more frequent ones. Even being around smoke profoundly zaps the immune system. Smoke dries out your nasal passages and paralyzes cilia. These are the delicate hairs that line the mucous membranes in your nose and lungs, and with their wavy movements, sweep cold and flu viruses out of the nasal passages. Experts contend that one cigarette can paralyze cilia for as long as 30 to 40 minutes.

\* Journal of the American Medical Association, September 15,

### Flu Facts

- **More than 200,000 people** are hospitalized each year because of flu-related illnesses.
- **Flu complications are more severe** in people over 50 and the highest rates of hospitalizations are found in people over 85.
- **Children under five** are hospitalized at higher rates than those in the 50 to 64 age group.
- **An average of 36,000 people** in the United States die from influenza each year.

Source: Journal of the American Medical Association

