

Keep High Risk Family Members Flu-Free

(NAPSA)—Heeding a few hints can help you protect your family from the flu. That's just as well, considering that in the United States the disease affects up to 60 million people a year. According to Dr. Neil Schachter, one of the leading authorities on respiratory disease and author of "The Good Doctor's Guide to Colds & Flu," about a third of the population is at high risk for serious complications from the flu that can lead to hospitalization or even death.

To help you keep loved ones healthy, Dr. Schachter identifies those at high risk and outlines simple steps to help avoid falling victim to this highly contagious illness.

Who's At High Risk?

Anyone can get the flu, but some people are more vulnerable to the virus and its complications. Those at risk include children 6 months to 18 years of age, people 50 years of age and older and anyone with chronic medical conditions such as heart or lung disease, diabetes and asthma. Here are some reasons these groups are at high risk for the flu:

- **Children:** Children may be more vulnerable because they have had limited time to develop a natural immunity to influenza. In addition, kids are in close contact with each other at school, home and day care, which increases the risk of catching and spreading the virus.

- **Older Americans:** As the body grows older, the immune system weakens, making it harder to fight off and treat respiratory infections.

- **People with Chronic Health Conditions:** Any condition affecting the immune system, such as diabetes, asthma or lung disease, can limit the body's ability to fight infection. The flu can also make chronic health problems worse.

Flu Prevention For People At High Risk:

People at high risk need to take special precautions to prevent flu and its complications. The Centers for Disease Control and

Who's At High Risk?

The flu is more likely to lead to serious health complications in the following people:

- Children 18 and under
- Adults 50 and older
- Anyone with a chronic illness such as asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease, diabetes



Prevention (CDC) recommends a "Take 3" approach to fight the flu, which includes vaccination, antiviral medications and good hygiene.

While an annual vaccine is the first line of defense against influenza for everyone, it is especially important for high risk populations to use all three strategies. It's also critical that anyone in close contact with high risk individuals—health care providers, family—take the same precautions to build a "cocoon" of limited flu exposure around them.

Prescription antiviral medications, including Tamiflu and Relenza, can play an important role against influenza for people at high risk. The vaccine is not 100 percent effective, so provide additional protection. Antivirals can also offer protection during the estimated two weeks it takes for the vaccine to become effective after administration.

Flu Treatment For People At High Risk:

Early diagnosis and proper treatment of the flu are critical for people at high risk to prevent serious complications. It is important to know the flu symptoms—sudden onset of fever, aches and extreme fatigue—and to call the doctor at the first signs of illness. If taken within 48 hours of symptom onset, antivirals can treat the flu at its source, helping people get better faster and reducing the risk of serious complications, such as pneumonia.

To order a copy of "The Good Doctor's Guide to Colds & Flu" or to ask Dr. Schachter a question, visit www.thegooddoctor1.com.