

Health Update

Expert Advice On Staying Healthy This Flu Season

(NAPSA)—While fears about a bird flu pandemic have grown recently overseas, an increasing number of people right here at home are falling ill with this winter's seasonal flu bug. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu incidence has been on the rise since late December, spreading from the Southwest corner of the U.S. and making its way eastward.

Seasonal flu affects up to 40 million Americans every year. Influenza and its complications are responsible for an average of 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths annually in the U.S.

"Many Americans see flu as a nuisance rather than a serious health threat," said Donald Perlman, M.D., who specializes in treating respiratory illnesses at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center in New Jersey. "While concern about the avian flu is understandable, the health risks associated with seasonal flu are much higher for the average American than the bird flu threat."

Despite the upswing in flu incidence, there are two fewer treatment options this season. The CDC has recommended against the use of amantadine and rimantadine for the prevention and treatment of influenza for the remainder of the 2005-2006 flu season due to increasing resistance levels. Instead, CDC recommends that oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) be prescribed if an antiviral medication is needed.

Dr. Perlman, an assistant clinical professor at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), emphasizes that flu is a preventable disease, and offers advice and simple measures

| Is it a cold or the flu? | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|--|
| Symptoms | Cold | Flu |
| Aches and pains | Slight | Usual, often severe |
| Chest discomfort | Mild to moderate | Common |
| Cough | Hacking | Non-productive, can become severe |
| Extreme exhaustion | Never | Early and prominent |
| Fever | Rare | Characteristic high (>103°F; 3-4 days) |
| Headaches | Rare | Prominent |
| Sneezing | Usual | Sometimes |
| Sore throat | Common | Sometimes |
| Stuffy nose | Often | Sometimes |
| Tiredness/weakness | Mild | Can last two to three weeks |

*Source: FluSTAR.com 

As the threat of bird flu grows overseas, seasonal flu, which affects 40 million Americans each year, packs a punch in the U.S.

everyone can take to help control its spread:

Prevention:

- **Get Vaccinated:** Vaccine is the first line of defense. Visit www.cdc.gov for vaccine locations in your area.

- **Wash Hands Frequently:** Germs are often spread when a person touches something contaminated followed by the eyes, nose or mouth. Wash hands often for 20 seconds with warm, soapy water.

- **Practice Respiratory Etiquette:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, to reduce the chances of spreading the virus to others.

- **Monitor Flu Outbreaks in Your Area:** Stay informed of when the flu hits your city by logging on to www.flustar.com, which provides updates on flu outbreaks on a regional and nationwide basis.

If You Get Sick:

- **Know the Difference Between Cold and Flu:** Many people are confused by cold and flu symptoms. Above are some tips to help you tell the difference.

- **See Your Doctor at First Signs of Flu:** Early diagnosis and treatment can help lessen the time you are sick, so see your doctor at the first sign of flu symptoms. He or she may prescribe an antiviral medication such as Tamiflu, which can reduce the duration and severity of flu symptoms if taken within 48 hours of symptom onset. Antiviral medications can also be used to help prevent the spread of flu within a household or workplace if taken within two days of exposure to the influenza virus.

- **Stay Home:** Be considerate of others. If possible, stay home from work, school and errands when you are sick.