

When To Seek Emergency Care For The Flu

(NAPSA)—Here are hints to help keep you from worrying more than you have to:

Since the early symptoms of anthrax resemble those of the flu, emergency departments across the country are reporting a surge of patients with flu-like symptoms seeking testing for anthrax.

“During flu season last year, many emergency departments did not have the resources they needed to treat flu patients and often had to divert ambulances to other hospitals,” said Michael Carius, MD, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). “This year, the threat of anthrax may tax the system even more. That’s why it’s important for the public to know when to seek emergency care.”

Many illnesses begin with “flu-like” symptoms such as a mild fever, lack of energy, and muscle aches, dry cough, and sore throat. With the flu, fever and body aches can last three to five days. The cough and fatigue can last two or more weeks. The flu and a cold can also cause a stuffy, runny nose. If you have the flu, you can have any or all of these symptoms.

The early symptoms of inhalation anthrax may mimic the flu. However, anthrax does not cause a stuffy, runny nose. Anthrax symptoms also become progressively worse several hours to several days later and lead to severe breathing problems and shock.

“Unless you believe you have been exposed to anthrax, your symptoms probably indicate you have the flu or a cold,” said Dr. Carius.

Although the flu is a serious illness (20,000 people die from flu-related complications each year),



most people can usually treat their flu at home with bedrest and plenty of fluids. A non-aspirin pain reliever, such as acetaminophen, can be used to reduce fever. Do NOT give aspirin to infants, children or teenagers.

Call your doctor if you are experiencing signs of dehydration, seizures, earache, or a cough that produces discolored mucus.

Seek emergency medical attention if you have difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, severe chest or abdominal pain, persistent vomiting or diarrhea, coughing or vomiting blood, fainting or sudden dizziness.

A way to prevent severe flu symptoms and complications is to get a flu shot. Even if you get your flu shot, it does not guarantee you will not get sick this winter. Remember, if you do get sick, don’t panic. Your symptoms don’t necessarily mean you’ve been exposed to anthrax.

“If the public pays close attention to unfolding news, understands the risk of contracting anthrax and knows the signs and symptoms, they should feel armed against this deadly disease,” said Dr. Carius.