

## *Can you avoid the flu?*

### Know the FLU



Did you know that flu activity can start as early as October and occur through May? Sure it peaks in January or February but that's a long season. Do you have a plan to stay healthy? Here are some suggestions to stay healthy this flu season.

**Receive your annual flu vaccine** ideally by October to help provide you with protection. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for you to produce protective antibodies. There are vaccines that are injected into the muscle as well as nasal sprays. The vaccine contains three or four flu viruses and antibodies made in response to one virus can provide some protection against related viruses. The vaccine can reduce the severity of your illness if you become sick. Although vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza, antiviral treatment can be considered for ill persons and it is generally initiated within 48 hours of flu onset.

**Wash your hands – a lot – even if you have been vaccinated.** Sure you know that handwashing is indicated after using the rest room and before preparing food but have you thought about it after finishing your commute on public transportation or when you arrive home. Think about the communal surfaces that you touch. You may wish to carry your own pen and find time to decontaminate your computer mouse, keyboard, phone and doorknobs. Remember the vaccine's effectiveness depends upon the characteristics of the person being vaccinated (e.g. age) as well as the circulating flu strains.

Washing your hands after being in public or communal areas will help prevent you from acquiring the flu. The basic steps are to:

- Wet your hands with clean running water.
- Apply soap and work up a lather. Include the back of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails.
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
- Dry

Length of handwashing time matters; 20-30 seconds is needed (that is the amount of time it takes to sing Happy Birthday to a friend – twice).

Alcohol based sanitizers are now found in multiple spots on the Tufts campuses. Visible dirt or grease on your hands will decrease the effectiveness of the sanitizer. Additionally, sanitizers do not eliminate all types of germs (e. g. norovirus aka stomach flu).

**Keep your hands away from your faces** (especially the eyes, nose and mouth) to prevent inadvertently inoculating yourself with a virus!

**Get some sleep!** Perhaps you've heard that lack of sleep can impair your immune system which is a vital defense against colds, flu and some chronic diseases. Evidence indicates that this is more than an old wives' tale. The magic number seems to be about 7 hours. Many morning show personalities joke that they need to be in bed by 7 pm for the early morning wake-up times. For most people 7 hours of sleep requires going to bed about 7.5 hours before you need to awake. Thankfully most of the flu season months have shorter days to at least foster some good habits.

Be well!

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\*PLEASE DISPLAY ON COMMUNITY BOARDS OR SHARE WITH ANYONE WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED