

Here Comes Fall ... and the Flu!

AS SCOTTSDALE RESIDENTS, we look forward to the cooler weather that comes with fall and winter. But no one looks forward to the flu virus that also accompanies our favorite season. That may be especially true this year as experts expect the arrival of not just one, but two types of flu: seasonal flu and H1N1 flu, originally called "swine flu."

With these flu viruses looming, kids back in school, and colds just waiting to be caught, now is the time to guard against catching and spreading germs. A few simple steps can go a long way in protecting yourself, your family and others from illness.

1. Get your seasonal flu shot.

Jack Applefeld, M.D., medical director of critical care at Scottsdale Healthcare, encourages adults and children to get their seasonal flu shot. "We want to reduce the number of seasonal flu cases and protect as many people as possible," says Dr. Applefeld.

While a H1N1 vaccine is not yet ready, it should be available soon, he notes, adding, "Everyone needs to stay tuned to information on the H1N1 vaccine and follow guidance from county and state health agencies."

2. Practice good hand hygiene.

Patty Gray, a registered nurse and infection

prevention specialist at Scottsdale Healthcare who serves on the state's Infection Prevention Advisory Committee, says frequent hand washing is one of the most important ways to prevent catching or spreading germs.

According to Gray, hands always should be washed after covering a cough or sneeze or blowing your nose. Make sure you and other family members scrub with soap at least 15 seconds when washing hands. Alcohol-based hand gels also can be used and hands should be rubbed together until the gel dries.



By Keith Jones,
Scottsdale Healthcare

3. Remember respiratory etiquette.

Flu viruses are primarily spread through the coughing or sneezing of an infected person. That's why it's important to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Try to cough or sneeze into a tissue if possible, or cough into your sleeve, Gray says. Remember to throw the tissue in the trash afterward, then wash your hands.

4. Avoid close contact.

Although obvious, you should avoid contact with others who are sick, and keep away from others if you are sick. Like it or not, that means you or family members should stay home from work, school or other activities if you are ill. "This will help protect others from getting sick, as well as help you recover," says Gray.

5. Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

Droplets from a cough or sneeze of someone with a cold or the flu can move through the air and contaminate surfaces. If you touch something contaminated with germs, then touch your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands, the germs may spread.

6. Maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Gray recommends making sure you and your family eat healthy, stay hydrated and get plenty of sleep to keep your immune system strong. Don't forget to exercise and manage stress.

Do yourself, your loved ones and others a favor. As you prepare for Arizona's gorgeous fall and winter season, also get ready for the upcoming cold and flu season. Follow the prevention steps above, and watch for Scottsdale Healthcare to open its seasonal flu clinics for adults. ■

For updated information on seasonal and H1N1 flu, visit the Maricopa County Department of Public Health at www.wearepublichealth.org or the Arizona Department of Health Services at www.azdhs.gov. Keith Jones is the public relations director for Scottsdale Healthcare.