

June 1, 2009

Avoid The Flu, Wash Your Hands!

By now, you are aware of the media covering what the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia has to say about the recent Influenza Type A (H1N1) outbreak in Mexico.

This is NOT the usual time to hear news about influenza or flu outbreaks. Each year in early fall, the public is urged to obtain a vaccination or flu shot to prevent a respiratory influenza or flu during winter months. The annual vaccination is manufactured with dead viruses; usually three different types of viruses, to combat the type of influenza expected to affect people. The vaccination or flu shot is required annually; takes about two weeks to produce immunity; and lasts six months. Peak action is at about 3 months after receiving the vaccination so if you hear about someone getting the respiratory type flu in the spring, its because the flu shot is no longer effective. Not this year. This is a new flu strain; a strain that flu shots given last fall would NOT have protected a person against even during the vaccinations peak action time.

No doubt, you are aware of the expected symptoms of the flu that recently closed several schools across the nation. A fever, headache, body aches, sore throat and cough are the typical type symptoms of the respiratory type influenza, known as Influenza Type A (H1N1) or Swine flu. The term Swine flu is misleading in the fact that you do not get the flu from eating pork. This flu is air-borne or the way you might contract this flu is by breathing the same air as an affected person.

There is no vaccination for this type of influenza. It is possible that you may be in the same building, attending school or work; or riding on the same airplane as someone, who has the flu. So what can you do? The very best preventive measure is to wash your hands. Now, do not just run your hands under a faucet, grab a towel and dry your hands. You need to properly wash your hands.

The proper way to wash your hands is to use soap, preferably an antibacterial liquid soap and plenty of friction when washing your hands under a faucet of running water. The amount of time required is a minimum of 20 seconds and do not forget to rub between your fingers. Children in pre-schools and elementary schools use the alphabet to sing while washing their little hands. It accomplishes two things. The child washes his/her hands the proper amount of time and they learn the Alphabet.

Washing your hands frequently is important even if there is not a flu scare taking place. Wash before and after eating; after coughing or blowing your nose and especially after using the toilet. If a faucet is not available, then use a hand sanitizing agent. Do not directly touch the faucet when you shut it off and do not touch the door handle as you exit a public bathroom. It seems unthinkable, but many people still do not wash their hands properly and they do not wash at all after using the toilet. Yes, those same people, who do not properly wash their hands or do not wash at all, use the same faucets and door handles that you will be using in a public bathroom.