



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – December 3, 2002

CEDARS-SINAI DOCTORS OFFER ADVICE ON STAYING HEALTHY DURING THE FLU SEASON AND OUT OF THE E.R.

LOS ANGELES (December 3, 2002) – As winter approaches, health care providers are gearing up for the onset of influenza or “flu” season. According to the Center for Disease Control, December, January, February and March are the months with the heaviest flu activity In the United States.

“Not only are more people are admitted to the hospital during these flu periods, they are hospitalized for longer periods of time,” says Joel Geiderman, M.D., co-chair of the department of emergency medicine. For those patients visiting the E.R., this means that more beds are filled and there may be a longer waiting period for health services.

At Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, emergency department administrators are considering ways to prepare for increases in winter admissions activity. Because people who are 65 years old or older, pregnant or have other medical conditions are at high-risk for flu-related complications, health care providers want to treat high-risk populations first.

“We have a “quick care” area with a dedicated staff of nurse, physician and clinical partners to triage ambulatory patients. We try to operate this during peak hours to fast track these cases through the emergency department. This program allows us to see many patients with viral syndromes who do not have significant complications,” says Paul Silka, M.D., associate director of the department of emergency medicine. “While its important for people with severe cases of the flu to go to the doctor, people can save themselves a trip to the hospital by getting vaccinated with the influenza vaccine to reduce the severity of the illness or to avoid the flu altogether.”

In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics is now encouraging flu shots for all health children ages six months to two years. Previously, the group recommended flu shots for children in high-risk categories, such as those with chronic conditions.

Additionally, an increasing number of people are inquiring about flu medications as pharmaceutical companies conduct direct marketing campaigns to consumers. “While prescription anti-influenza medications are available, most patients do not qualify for them, as they need to be initiated early in the illness. Most people we see in the ED present because they have felt miserable for several days, or they have secondary complications of influenza such as pneumonia or profound dehydration.” Says Dr. Silka.

What's ailing you?

Many people may not know how to tell the difference between the common cold and flu. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the following symptoms are generally attributable to the cold and flu:

	Cold	Flu
Illness	Respiratory (breathing) Illness caused by viruses	Respiratory (breathing) Illness caused by influenza viruses
Symptoms		
Fever at or above 100F	Uncommon in adults or older children	Usual and can last 3 to 4 days
Headache	Usual	Usual with sudden onset, and can be severe
Muscle Aches	Mild	Usual and often severe
Tiredness and Exhaustion	Mild	Usual with sudden onset, and can be severe, and can last 2 or more weeks
Runny Nose	Usual	Usual
Cough	Usual	Usual and can become severe
Chest Discomfort	Uncommon	Uncommon
Vomiting	Uncommon	Uncommon in adults but more likely in very young children

“Because there are areas of overlap between the illnesses, people concerned about their condition should seek medical care.” advises Dr. Silka.

Treating the Flu

According to Dr. Geiderman, people can generally treat their flu infections by:

- Getting plenty of rest
- Drinking lots of fluids
- Taking over-the-counter medicine, such as aspirin or acetaminophen. Parents should not give aspirin to children and adolescents who have the flu.

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