

How Are You Coping With The Flu Season?

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This fall, we are contending with two types of flu: seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu. Both have similar symptoms, but as fall and winter progress, we'll continue to know more about the H1N1 strain. Vaccines for both types are available.

The flu hits you fast, unlike the common cold. For instance, you may feel fine in the morning but very sick by the afternoon. Symptoms for both flu types may include chills, fever, muscle aches, headache, weakness, loss of appetite, sore throat, cough, nasal congestion and chest pain.

Do your best to avoid catching the flu. Some good rules to follow include frequent hand-washing with soap and water or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Also, covering your mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, or coughing or sneezing into your upper sleeve if you have no tissue are the best ways to prevent the virus from spreading. If you are sick, and you must be around other people, wear a mask to protect others from becoming infected.

Who's at the greatest risk?

The high-risk groups recommended by the Centers for Disease Control to receive the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine include:

- Pregnant women because they are at higher risk of complications and can potentially provide protection to infants who cannot be vaccinated
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than six months of age because younger infants are at higher risk of influenza-related complications and can not be vaccinated.
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel because this can be a potential source of infection for vulnerable patients.
- All people from six months through 24 years of age

- Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza

So, if you get it, here are a number of steps to take to help alleviate flu symptoms and control the spread of the virus. In addition to plenty of rest and fluids, flu sufferers may find over-the-counter pain relievers for aches, and fever and decongestants for coughs, offer symptomatic relief. Contact your doctor before taking decongestants due to causing problems if you have hypertension. Do not give aspirin to children and teenagers.

Clear liquids and a BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast) can help those who are nauseous. Again, frequent hand-washing, covering your mouth or wearing a surgical mask are the best ways to prevent the virus from spreading. In most individuals who are otherwise healthy, the flu goes away within seven to 10 days.

If you have symptoms and they are getting worse even with following the above measures, you may need to make an appointment with your primary care physician. Your own doctor is the best resource you have to diagnose and treat the flu.

If you need to see a physician after hours or on weekends, go to a Minor Care Center. Minor Care facilities are designed to help with overflow from physician offices and to serve patients after hours and on weekends. They are staffed by highly qualified physicians and other healthcare professionals, and you don't need an appointment. Please be aware that this time of year, there is often a significant wait. Unless a condition is urgent, patients are seen in the order they arrive. However, if your symptoms are severe and overwhelming, go to the Emergency Room.

For an appointment, please call Family Physicians of Boiling Springs at 864-560-3650.