



Plan for the Novel Coronavirus 2019-nCoV, but Don't Forget about the Seasonal Flu

Insights

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Although the cases have slowed in some areas, we still expect a heavy flu season. According to the [CDC's January 18 FLUVIEW](#), we're up to 15-million U.S. flu illnesses, 140,000 hospitalizations, and 8,200 deaths, especially among the young.

From the New York Times two weeks ago:

The Flu Season May Yet Turn Ugly, C.D.C. Warns

As of the last week of December, "widespread" flu activity was reported by health departments in 46 states. More ominously, a second measure — the percentage of patients with flu symptoms visiting medical clinics — shot up almost to the peak reached at the height of the 2017-18 flu season, which was the most severe in a decade.

About 61,000 Americans died of flu that season, the C.D.C. said. (The original estimate of 79,000 was revised downward last year; the agency said the number changed as more death certificate information became available.)

This year's flu vaccine may not be particularly effective against the strain of the virus now widespread in the United States, experts said. But even so, it's worth getting the shot: people who are vaccinated fare better if struck by the flu than those who are not.

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The current season did begin unusually early. By late November, the flu had hit hard in the Deep South, from Texas to Georgia. The virus then broke out in California and the Rocky Mountain states but was not widespread in the Northeast until recently.

Over 42 million people contracted the flu during the 2018-2019 flu season, which was the longest in 10 years. According to the CDC, this annual travail costs employers \$10.4 billion in "direct costs," such as hospitalizations and treatment. Lost productivity due to the 2018 flu was estimated at over \$21 billion.

To put this in perspective, the frightening [2003 SARS](#) generated 8089 worldwide cases and 774 deaths – versus 61,000 U.S. 2017 seasonal flu deaths.

Employers cannot do a great deal to minimize the effects of yearly influenza, but they do get great bang for their buck for taking several simple steps:

- Emphasize handwashing year-round and highlight it during Flu Season. Creatively keep the need fresh on employee's minds.
- Discourage sick people from coming to work and spreading their flu.
- Promote seasonal Flu Vaccinations.

Strongly Encourage Seasonal Flu Vaccinations.

We're not talking today about the question of whether certain types of employers may mandate flu vaccinations for certain workers. Rather, we are encouraging employers to redouble their efforts to promote vaccinations. Studies indicate that many people do not consider the vaccination to be worth the small risk.

The CDC actively promotes Employer Flu Vaccination efforts.

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/business/promoting-vaccines-workplace.htm>

As do organizations such as Quest Diagnostics.

<https://www.questforhealth.com/consider-this/flu-shots/>

Protect the Young and the Older.

As of January 18, over 50% of Influenza positive test results were for children and young adults under 25, while only 12% were adults over 65.

While young people are more at risk to catch the flu, older people often suffer more severe cases.

Use these facts to motivate employees and their families – None of Us Wants to Inadvertently Harm the Young or the Old. We have a civic responsibility to do what we can to remain healthy, avoid the flu, and not spread it to others.

Count to 20 seconds.

The CDC recommends washing one's hands for 20-seconds to effectively eliminate the Flu virus as well as the Novel 2019-nCoV virus. The abrasive action is crucial. 20-seconds is far longer than we realize. Encourage employees to take a simple test – count 1001 to 1020! Watch this CDC video or more entertaining options on YouTube.

For Information on the novel 2019-nCoV (coronavirus) see:

Coronavirus CDC/Home

CDC 2019 Novel Coronavirus 2019-nCoV – Wuhan China

Our Take on the Coronavirus: Be Proactive and Don't Panic

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