



Taking Aim Against The Flu

The strain of influenza that crosses the country each winter is mutated from the past year's strain and results in the hospitalization of more than 114,000 people in the United States each year. Over the past 30 years, the flu has "peaked" in February with January recording the next highest number of cases.

The flu is a serious health matter that continues to kill an average of approximately 36,000 people each year. It is especially serious for people over 65, very young children, people with chronic health problems and pregnant women. Most people who get influenza will recover in one to two weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are three examples of complications from flu. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may have worsening of this condition that is triggered by the flu.

With the 2006-2007 flu season well underway, your best line of defense against the flu is prevention. To help you take aim at preventing the flu, the National Health Ministries of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has compiled these common sense tips for protecting yourself and others from the flu and stay healthy this season:

Get your flu shot –It is especially critical for those at highest risk for complications from the flu to act quickly to receive their vaccines. According to the latest information from the National Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Center for Infectious Diseases, a projected 100 million doses will be available during the 2006-07 season, however, the CDC, also is indicating that distribution and delivery problems might cause some locations to experience a shortage in the supply of the vaccine. If you have questions regarding your risk status, consult your physician or call your local public health department.

Create and maintain hygienic environments that reduce or eliminate the spread of the flu virus.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

Stay home when you are sick. If possible, stay home from work, school, church and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

Cover your mouth and nose. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. There are new tissues that are more effective in killing bacteria and virus. Use them!

Cover Your Cough. Do not cough or sneeze into the air. The droplets you produce could infect people as far away as 20 feet. If you do not have a tissue sneeze or cough into the crook of your arm and as quickly as possible change your clothing.

Wash your hands, thoroughly and often. Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. It is best to wash your hands with soap and clean running water for 20 seconds. However, if soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based product to clean your hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast acting.

Aim for prevention this flu season – your assertive approach to health and hygiene will make for a happier and healthier winter for you and those you know and love.