The Flu…It is that Time of Year

The flu season is in full swing and slowly moving its way into our community. As always, being prepared is important in keeping yourself healthy. *Josefa B. Peña, MPH, Program Specialist - Adult Health, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service,* reminds us in the following article that being prepared and knowing the facts is the best prevention.

Influenza, more commonly known as the flu, is a contagious illness caused by a virus that affects the upper respiratory system (nose, mouth, sinuses, and throat). The flu virus spreads easily from person to person and can live on surfaces for hours. The flu season occurs every year from October to May and affects up to 20 percent of the U.S. population.

**Symptoms**

• High fever (100 °F and above)

• Dry cough

• Sore throat

• Muscle aches or pain

• Runny or stuffy nose

• Headache

• Lack of energy

• May cause diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting

**Possible Complications**

• Ear infection

• Sinus infection

• Dehydration

• Pneumonia

**Spread**

The flu spreads easily from person to person. It can be “caught” by:

• Breathing airborne droplets of the flu virus from others’ coughs or sneezes.

• Touching virus-contaminated surfaces (tables, doorknobs, telephones) and then touching your

 nose, mouth, or eyes with virus-contaminated hands.

**Prevention**

• Get an annual flu shot in the fall before the flu season starts.

• Stay 3 to 6 feet away from others who are sick.

• Stop kissing and hugging others until you are well.

• Remain at home when sick. Do not return to school or work until your fever is below 100 ˚F for

 at least 24 hours without using fever-reducing medicine.\*

• Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water, or use

 alcohol-based hand sanitizer when water is not available.

• Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth.

• Strengthen your immune system with healthy lifestyle habits. Eat a balanced diet with plenty of

 fruits and vegetables. Get plenty of rest. Sleep at least 7 to 8 hours a night. Exercise

 regularly—at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week. Reduce your daily stress

 level.

**Home Treatment**

• Stay home and rest.

• Drink plenty of fluids (water, juice, electrolyte drinks).

• Take over-the-counter medications to ease symptoms.

• Antiviral medications are available by prescription from your doctor.\*\*

• Run a cool-mist humidifier. Clean it regularly according to the instruction manual to

 prevent mold.

**See a Doctor When**

• A young child, pregnant woman, elderly person, or someone with a chronic health

 condition becomes ill with the flu—they have an increased chance of flu complications.

• A stiff neck develops along with fever.

• Complications, such as difficulty breathing or signs of dehydration occur.

• Symptoms worsen each day.

• You are concerned and need advice.

*\* Fever-reducing medicines include Acetaminophen (Tylenol, generic brand), Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, generic brand), and aspirin. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 20 years old because of the danger of Reye’s syndrome, a rare but serious illness.*

\*\* To be effective, take antiviral medications within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms. Antiviral medications are recommended for people with a high risk of having flu complications.

Produced by AgriLife Communications. The Texas A&M University System July 2010 *Josefa B. Peña, MPH, Program Specialist - Adult Health*

For more information about the flu, visit the Texas Extension Disaster Education Network

(EDEN) website at texashelp.tamu.edu. or please feel free to contact the AgriLife Extension Office at 903-473-4580 or visit us at rains.agrilife.org. We are also on Facebook at Facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences. Go and “Like” our page to keep up with the latest news, events, and programs offered by Family & Consumer Sciences in Rains County.

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