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Get a shot, not the flu

St. Johns~ Falling temperatures, crisp mornings and changing leaves signals the start of fall but also reminds us that the dreaded flu season is right around the corner.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), every year in the United States up to twenty percent of the population gets the flu, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized as a result of flu complications, and about 36,000 die.

“The flu should not be taken lightly,” said Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). “One person infected with the flu virus can potentially infect up to fifteen others. The best way to prevent this potentially deadly disease is for everyone age six months and older, especially those at high risk for developing serious flu complications, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, to get vaccinated.”

It is especially important for school age children- 5 through 18 years of age- to be vaccinated since this population is among the main transmitters of the flu virus. Parents should also keep in mind that children 6 to 59 months of age are considered high risk and should be vaccinated as should women who are pregnant during flu season (October through March).

The main way that flu is spread is from person to person through coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person travel through the air and reach the mouth or nose of people nearby. Sometimes flu can be spread when a person touches droplets, nose drainage or saliva from an infected person, or a soiled object, and then touches one’s own (or someone else’s) nose or mouth before washing their hands.

Symptoms of the flu generally include high fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. While most people who get influenza will recover in a few days to less than two weeks, some develop life-threatening complications, such as bacterial pneumonia, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions like congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes.

Getting your seasonal flu shot is just one of many things you can do to stay healthy this winter. MMDHD also offers the following tips:

- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- Clean your hands often, especially after sneezing, coughing, using the bathroom, before eating, and before touching your eyes, mouth or nose.
- Wash with soap and water for at least twenty seconds. Hand sanitizers are a good option if no soap and water are available.

Contact the Mid-Michigan District Health Department with any questions or for more information at 989-227-3106 or visit www.mmdhd.org.

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