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The Facts About the Flu



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Worried about catching the flu this season? Knowing the facts behind some of the most common myths about the flu can provide the best chance at staying healthy.

Myth #1: The flu is just a bad cold and isn't that serious.

"Influenza, or the flu, is a viral infection that most commonly causes fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills and body aches," said Stephanie Raynish, M.D., a board certified family medicine physician affiliated with Salem Regional Medical Center (SRMC) and SRMC Primary Care-Salem. "Flu can lead to serious illness or even life-threatening complications – especially in children, adults age 65 and older, pregnant women and those with certain chronic health conditions."

Myth #2: If you don't feel sick, you cannot spread the flu.

Dr. Raynish explained that the flu is typically spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, and most healthy adults become contagious the day before they have symptoms. People with the flu can remain infectious for up to 5-7 days after their symptoms appear.

Myth #3: Healthy people don't need to be vaccinated against the flu.

Anyone, even healthy people, can get the flu. The best way to avoid the flu is by getting the flu vaccine.

"I recommend that everyone over the age of six months receive the yearly flu vaccine, with few exceptions," Dr. Raynish advised. "While it isn't 100% effective guarding against the flu, the vaccine can still help to reduce the severity and duration of symptoms."

Myth #4: It's not necessary to have a flu shot every year.

"It's important to get a flu vaccine every year to stay healthy. Whether you've gotten a flu shot or have had a flu infection, your body's immunity to the virus decreases over time. Also, flu viruses are constantly changing, so the vaccine is updated annually to protect against the strains that are circulating," she noted.

Myth #5: The flu vaccine can give you the flu.

"The flu vaccine is safe for most people, and contains a killed or weakened virus that cannot give you the flu. You should talk to your doctor or health care provider to see if the vaccine is right for you," Dr. Raynish said.

Flu Prevention Tips

- Get vaccinated
- Wash your hands (alcohol-based hand rubs can be used when soap and water aren't available)
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Stay home when you're sick
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill
- Eat a well-balanced diet, exercise 4 to 5 days a week and get 7 to 9 hours of sleep every night

Stephanie Raynish, M.D., Family Medicine treats patients of all ages at SRMC Primary Care – Salem, located at 2020 East State Street, Suite C, in Salem. Appointments with Dr. Raynish can be scheduled by calling 330-332-7807. She is affiliated with Salem Regional Medical Center's medical staff.