



NAVY MEDICINE

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Bureau of Navy Medicine and Surgery
2300 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20372-5300

Contact:
Ilka Regino
202-762-3321
Ilka.Regino@med.navy.mil

Doris Ryan
2020762-3317
Doris.Ryan@med.navy.mil

September 8, 2009

THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE – WASH YOUR HANDS AND STAY HEALTHY DURING THE FLU SEASON

By Doris Ryan, Public Affairs Specialist, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

WASHINGTON —Hand washing is the easiest way to prevent the spread of influenza this fall. Influenza is not the common cold, it can be a severe and sometimes life-threatening illness. Influenza viruses spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, especially if they don't cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their arm. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with influenza viruses on it and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. "Keeping your hands clean is one of the easiest ways to avoid getting sick and spreading the flu at home, at school or in the workplace," said Captain Tanis Batsel-Stewart, a preventive medicine physician and Director, Emergency Preparedness and Contingency Support at the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Headquarters for Navy Medicine. "It is best to wash your hands with soap and running water for 20 seconds or more. If soap isn't available a person can use an alcohol-based gel which is fast acting and will reduce the number of germs on hands."

According to Batsel-Stewart, the basics for hand washing are pretty straight forward. Wet hands under clean, warm running water, then apply soap. Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces – including between the fingers and up around the wrists. Continue for 20 seconds or more. Rinse hands well under running water and dry hand using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use the paper towel to turn off the faucet.

If soap and water are not available use an alcohol-based gel to clean hands, added Batsel-Stewart. Apply plenty of gel to the palm of one hand, then rub hands together to rub the gel over all the surfaces of the hands and fingers until hands are dry.

While hand washing is key to preventing illness and the spread of infection, everyone should get their annual seasonal influenza vaccination.

“Immunization remains the primary method of reducing seasonal influenza illness and its complications,” said Batsel-Stewart. “The seasonal influenza vaccine not only helps protect you, but also helps protect your family and entire community by preventing and reducing the spread of the disease.”

Navy Medicine’s seasonal influenza vaccine program is designed to protect sailors and Marines, mission-essential healthcare personnel and beneficiaries. Beneficiaries should contact their primary care provider team to find out what the local schedule is for the vaccine.

“Navy Medicine has a very proactive stance to preparing for the seasonal flu each year and even more so this year as we do our best to get everyone vaccinated against seasonal influenza earlier than in other years,” said Batsel-Stewart. “We want everyone to know that there are two different vaccines for the flu this year. You can start getting your seasonal flu shots this month. We will have the other vaccine, the H1N1 vaccine, starting in October. We hope everyone who can get both vaccines will get them. Until you can get your vaccines, wash your hands and avoid sick people. Stay home from work, school and other gathering places if you are sick.”

Navy Medicine will be monitoring the seasonal influenza viruses carefully over the coming weeks and months and has contingency plans to address any public health issues if required.

“Force health protection is the responsibility of every commander, but it starts with the service member,” added Batsel-Stewart. “It is important for all of us to take the proper actions to

protect ourselves, other personnel, beneficiaries, coworkers and family members against both seasonal and H1N1 influenza.”

Symptoms of influenza include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, chills, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea also can occur but are more common in children than adults.

Complications of influenza can include bacterial pneumonia; ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

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