

Preventing the Flu After Vaccination

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admin

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Monday was the first day of fall — at least that's what the calendar said. In Texas, it was a record-breaking 100 degrees.

One thing that's not going to wait for cooler temperatures to arrive is influenza, or the flu.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), no set time period defines flu season. However, flu activity begins to increase in October, and peaks from December to February.

The CDC recommends that people get vaccinated before the end of October to give flu-protecting antibodies time to develop. A flu shot is crucial for people at high risk of serious complications, including death, from the virus.

This includes inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) patients, who may have weakened immune systems caused by medications such as prednisone and biologics. A recent study by Penn State Hershey Medical Center found that IBD patients "had an increased risk of influenza compared with those without IBD and were more likely to require hospitalization."

I try to get my flu shot as soon as it becomes available. I was vaccinated at a flu shot clinic earlier this month rather than waiting for my annual physical at the end of October.

During the 2018-2019 flu season, the flu vaccine was only 29 percent effective. I take extra precautions to better defend myself against infection.

The flu spreads from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Droplets of saliva can infect others up to 6 feet away if they are inhaled or ingested. A person can also become sick by touching their mouth or nose after touching a contaminated surface. I do my best to avoid contact with infected people and surfaces.

I avoid crowds during flu season, especially in small, poorly ventilated areas. When shopping, I'll stop dead in my tracks and run the other way if I hear someone sneeze or cough. If someone near me in a crowded room is sick, especially if they don't cover their face when sneezing or coughing, I'll move away or leave the area. When I can't avoid contact, I'll turn away and hold my breath to avoid inhaling germs until I'm out of the line of fire.

Sometimes, there's no escape, such as if I'm traveling by plane or at a doctor's office. To protect myself, I keep a reusable Breathe Healthy face mask in my purse. In addition to filtering flu and cold viruses, the mask filters dust, allergens, and bacteria. The cloth mask is environmentally friendly and available in a variety of patterns.

I also practice proper hand hygiene. Soap and water is the best method for dirty hands. But if hands are not visibly soiled, the CDC suggests using a hand sanitizer that contains 60 to 95 percent alcohol. I stash small bottles of sanitizer and disinfectant wipes in my purse, my car, and my husband's car.

Doors are my nemesis. I never touch public door handles unless absolutely necessary. Thankfully, my husband is a gentleman, and I'm not so much of a feminist that I don't appreciate a man opening a door for me. If he's not around, I use my forearm or shoulder to open doors. When I have to touch a door handle or knob, I cover it with my sleeve or a tissue. If I have to touch it with my bare hand, I follow that with hand sanitizer.

I use the same tactic of wiping down surfaces, especially in grocery stores and restaurants. After hearing news reports about the germs on grocery carts and menus, I'm surprised people don't become ill more often.

I was fortunate not to get the flu last year. I'm hoping for the same luck this year.

What do you do to prepare for flu season? Please share in the comments below.

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