

September 2009 Newsletter



Setting us all a fine example: Miles with cod liver oil, a little broccoli snack, and a pillow for a good night's sleep.

H1N1 influenza update: Don't let the swine flu catch you!

NOTE: These recommendations are based on the facts as we know them as we go to print – check out the following sites for updates: www.uptodate.com/patients or www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/

It looks like the dominant flu this season will be the new(ish) pandemic strain known as H1N1. We now have data from Australia and New Zealand, where the flu season is drawing to an end. They reported that the H1N1 flu caused an early, intense and fairly short flu season, with remarkably little of the 'typical' seasonal flu virus seen. In other words, the H1N1 flu may have displaced the usual seasonal flu. Given that the H1N1 immunization was not in use in Australia and New Zealand, the news is reassuring. Even though there were some severe cases, it was mostly a mild disease. Nevertheless, if we have a similar pattern in the U.S., with many cases early in the season, there will be real potential for panic... but try to avoid getting caught up in it. It is likely that the H1N1 flu will be similar in severity to our usual flu, but no-one knows for sure. Keep in mind that our seasonal flu is blamed for about 36,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. Perspective is a great antidote to panic.

Highest risk groups

Based on H1N1 hospitalization data, those at greatest risk for complications are people with chronic illness such as serious lung and heart disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes, and those with suppressed immune systems. The age group at greatest risk appears to be 0 – 64, presumably because they have not been exposed to the same range of viruses as those over 65.

Symptoms

As with other influenza, the main symptoms are fever, cough, rhinitis (runny nose), body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, and sore throat, but vomiting and diarrhea are reported as well. Testing for this virus is not generally recommended.

Treatment

- **Bed rest and plenty of fluids** are the main treatments. And stay home! Don't return to work until 24 hours with no fever, without using fever-reducing agents.
- Occilococcinum may have value as a treatment, and elderberry standardized extract (Sambucol Pro) is tasty, and probably works.
- Mild or moderate cases of flu will usually not be treated with antiviral medications. Antiviral medication such as Tamiflu is currently recommended *only for serious illness*, or flu in patients at high risk of complications.
- Remember that most people who get the flu recover uneventfully by resting and taking self care steps. Feel free to stop by our office to pick up our *Cold, Flu and Sinusitis* handout (also available under 'resources' on our website goodfoodgreatmedicine.com) for advice on how to care for yourself if you do get the flu.
- However, if you are failing to see any improvement, have high fevers or any unusual or worrisome symptoms, it would be wise to call our office.

Self care steps for prevention

1. Strengthen your immune system

Here are some immune-boosting strategies to reduce our risk of getting severe forms of infections, particularly viral infections. Notice the use of the word *severe*: it seems to be perfectly normal to get *mild* versions of viruses, especially when we are children. Apparently a runny nose now and then is akin to our immune system having a healthy workout at the gym. Here is an abbreviated summary – see our *Cold, Flu and Sinusitis* handout for more detail.

- **Get enough sleep!** Schedule 7 – 9 hours daily.
- **Exercise daily**, like a brisk 30-60-minute walk.
- **Avoid refined carbohydrates**, like sugar, white flour, white rice. Read ingredient labels!
- **Eat yogurt and kefir most days** for their live anti-bacterial cultures (*probiotics*) – read labels, and avoid anything with added sweetening or flavors.
- **Eat whole foods:** whole grains and beans, whole fruit (*not* juice) and vegetables, and healthy fats like extra virgin olive oil and raw nuts.
- **Eat protein with meals**, including eggs, beans, whole grains, and fish (don't overlook sardines).
- **Get adequate vitamin D:** 1,000 – 2,000 units of vitamin D daily as a supplement, or about 1 tablespoon each day of cod liver oil.¹ Sunlight (without sunscreen) is still the best source.

2. Wash your hands often! Simple soap and water is enough to kill this virus. The virus spreads primarily by droplets, so carry tissues with you, cover your mouth with a tissue (or your sleeve, if necessary) when you cough or sneeze. Remember to toss tissues directly in the trash.

3. Immunization is another way to (hopefully) prevent the H1N1 flu. The vaccine will be available at selected centers, probably pharmacies, in the coming weeks. The Public Health Authorities are strongly recommending that high risk people get the immunization. We don't have a strong recommendation one way or the other – and understand why many of our patients would not want to be first in line for a new vaccine. We hope that the Australian experience, where no immunization was available and the disease was mostly mild, is predictive of the coming flu season here.

Get the big picture

Protecting yourself from the flu involves largely the same steps that help prevent heart disease, type 2 diabetes, dementia, and cancer. Regardless of the health-threat-du-jour, live your life in such a way that you can reduce your risk of the above diseases while at the same time priming your immune system to be in the best shape to deal with any health challenges that come your way. It takes effort, but it's worth it.

Free seminars

Presented by Dr. Hassell at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center (6-8 pm):

- **Sept. 22nd** *Preventing and Reversing Heart Disease*. Using your lifestyle choices to prevent (and possibly reverse) heart disease, and control blood pressure and cholesterol.
- **Oct. 20th** *Preventing and Reversing Type 2 Diabetes and Insulin Resistance*. Optimal lifestyle choices for diabetics & anyone wanting to avoid diabetes.

Please call our office at 503-291-1777 to register.

Upcoming Speaking Events

9/17/2009– Providence Cancer Center Integrative Medicine Program:

Miles Hassell, MD and Cindy Reuter, ND, MSOM, L.Ac., RD: *Making Your Way Through the Supplement Jungle: Vitamins, Minerals and Herbs*. PSVMC. This talk is free. For more info see: www.providence.org/integrativemedicine and choose the 'classes' link or call the Providence Resource Line @ (503)574-6595.

9/30/2009– Housecall Providers Breakfast: Miles Hassell, MD: *How a Greek Grandmother Would Improve the Health of the Nation...Looking at the Evidence Behind the Mediterranean Diet*. Portland, Oregon.

10/6/2009– NEXT Steps Against Breast Cancer: Miles Hassell, MD and Ken Weizer, ND: *Nutrition and Exercise Today to Reduce Risk and Improve Survival*. For more information call (503) 574-6595.

10/17/2009– Beaverton Foursquare Church – Healthy Lifestyle Seminar: Miles Hassell, MD: Beaverton, Oregon.

10/21/2009– Providence Portland Medical Center, Internal Medicine Grand Rounds: Miles Hassell, MD: *Ischemic Heart Disease: non-pharmacologic approaches*. Portland, Oregon.

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”

1 Thess. 5:21

¹ Cannell, J.J. *Epidemiol Infect.* 2006;134:1129-40