

The Allergy & Asthma Clinic

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Newsletter

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Flu Season: Why It May Be One of the Worst

Several health agencies predict that the upcoming flu season may be one of the worst we have had in recent years. Last year's flu season was fairly mild, but this year, Australia, located in the Southern Hemisphere, had one of their worst flu seasons in 5 years. In fact, it was reported that cases were 3 times higher than average and the flu peaked a couple of months earlier than usual.

Infectious disease and public health experts in the Northern hemisphere generally look to what's happening in the Southern hemisphere as a predictor of where things will go during our winter, explains Amesh A. Adalja, M.D., infectious disease expert and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. "The planet has two hemispheres which have opposite respiratory viral seasons," he says. "Therefore, Australia's flu season—which is just ending—is often predictive of what will happen in the Northern hemisphere."

Influenza can cause serious health complications and one concern that many have is the fact that most of the population has not been exposed to the flu because of COVID 19 precautions and the mild cases of flu we've had in the last couple of years. According to Dr. Thomas Russo, Professor and Chief of Infectious Disease at the University at Buffalo in New York. "Immunity to respiratory viruses, including the flu, wanes over time," he says. "People have not seen the virus naturally for a couple of years and many individuals don't get the flu vaccine." That, he says, raises the risk that people who are unvaccinated against the flu will develop more severe cases if they do happen to get infected.

As we have seen, many COVID 19 restrictions have been lifted and many of us have resumed traveling and being in larger public gatherings. While these liberties are a welcome change, closer interactions often lead to higher rates of transmission of respiratory viruses.

How to protect yourself against the flu

-According to the CDC, flu season in the United States starts in October, peaks between December and February, and sometimes, last until May. We therefore recommend that patients get their flu shots around Halloween, since the benefits of the flu shot may wear off before the flu season ends if you get the flu shot too early. You need to be vaccinated one month before influenza comes, because it takes about a month to get the antibodies you want for protection," says Adolfo Garcia-Sastre, director of the Global Health and Emerging Pathogens Institute at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City.

-Getting the flu shot is especially important for older adults because they are at higher risk of developing complications from the flu. Many older adults also have pre-existing medical conditions, further increasing the possibility of a health complication.

-Speak with your primary care physician about which vaccine you should receive. This is also the time to review with your physician whether your other vaccinations are current.

-Masks continue to be effective in the prevention of COVID 19 and other respiratory viruses, including the flu. Try to wear masks while indoors, especially where social distancing is difficult to enforce.

-Make sure that you are taking all of your prescribed medications, from all of your physicians, as prescribed. For those with asthma and other respiratory issues, make sure that you are taking preventative steps to keep your asthma under the best possible control. If you are on allergy shots or drops, make sure that you are getting them as scheduled.

In our experience, there is often a "last minute-rush" to be seen by one of our providers in the office (either for a follow up or for allergy testing) during this time of the year. We encourage you to call our office as soon as possible so that we can do our best to accommodate your request before the end of the year.

In observance of the Thanksgiving Holidays, the office will be closed on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, and Friday, November 25. We will be open for injections in our San Mateo office on Wednesday, November 23, between 9 AM- 4:30 PM.