In the Loop

Preparing for the 2022-2023 Flu Season

Influenza (flu) season lasts from October through May in the United States, with peak flu activity happening between December and March. The country's flu activity has been unusual since the COVID-19 pandemic began, which could pose consequences for the upcoming season.

Flu season in the Southern Hemisphere may indicate what's to come in the United States. In particular, Australia has been experiencing an unusual surge in flu activity early in the season. Health experts now warn that the same could happen in the United States later this year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the flu caused between 9 million and 41 million illnesses yearly in the United States from 2010-2020.

The flu can cause serious complications for people of any age, but children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. To help keep your household healthy this flu season, consider the following suggestions:

- Get the flu vaccine. Being vaccinated against the flu is your best chance of preventing the illness. The CDC recommends that anyone 6 months of age and older get a flu shot every year. Ideally, everyone would be vaccinated by the end of October, as recommended by the CDC. That being said, vaccination after October can still provide protection during the peak of flu season.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and stay away from others when you feel unwell. Because flu and COVID-19 symptoms are similar, doctors say it's best to get tested to know what you have.

- Wash your hands often using soap and warm water to protect against germs. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent the spread of germs.

- Get quality sleep, stay active and drink plenty of water to keep your immune system strong.

- Eat a nutritious diet rich in healthy grains, fruits, vegetables and fiber.

During this flu season, it's important to get vaccinated. While you may catch the flu if you receive a vaccine, immunization is proven to reduce the severity of the illness. Contact your doctor today to learn more about vaccines.

Health Panel Calls for Routine Anxiety Screening for Adults

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recently recommended that adults under the age of 65 get regularly screened for anxiety. This recommendation applies to adults 19 and older who don't have a diagnosed mental health disorder. It's meant to help primary care clinicians identify early signs of anxiety, which can go undetected for years. This is the first time the Task Force has recommended anxiety screening in adult primary care without symptoms.

The Task Force, a group of independent disease prevention and medical experts, defines anxiety disorders as "characterized by greater duration or intensity of a stress response over everyday events." Recognized disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder and agoraphobia.

The panel further noted that the lifetime prevalence of anxiety disorders in adults in the United States is 40.4% for women and 26.4% for men. The recommendation was prioritized due to anxiety's public health influence and the country's increased focus on mental health in recent years.

> **"Our hope is that by raising awareness of these issues and having recommendations for clinicians, that we'll be able to help all adults in the United States, including those who experience disparities."**
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> **- Lori Pbert, Task Force member**

The guidance stops short of recommending anxiety screening for people 65 and older since many common symptoms of aging—such as trouble sleeping, pain and fatigue—can also be symptoms of anxiety. The Task Force said there wasn't enough evidence to determine the accuracy of screening tools in older adults to distinguish between anxiety symptoms and conditions of aging.

The Task Force emphasizes that if you already show signs or symptoms of anxiety, you should be assessed and connected to care. If you have concerns about anxiety, contact your doctor.