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**Flu Season Still in Full Swing ─ and it’s a Bad One!**

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has just reported that U.S. flu levels now rival the 2009 swine flu pandemic. 63 pediatric deaths related to the flu have been reported so far. Outpatient visits to hospitals and emergency departments by patients with influenza-like illness have now reached levels not seen since the 2009 season, and according to the CDC, we are on the way to breaking records. At least several more weeks of the flu are still in the offing. However, there are still things you can do to prevent getting the flu or lessen symptoms should you be infected.

**Number 1, get a flu shot!** The flu shot won’t guarantee you won’t come down with the flu, but if you do, your symptoms should be less severe and your recovery time quicker. Flu shots are widely available at low or no cost, depending on your insurance company. Many local pharmacies carry the flu shot and are able to administer the vaccine on site. No appointment necessary! Just walk right in and get inoculated.

**Number 2, wash your hands!** In a flu season like this one, there’s no such thing as too much hand-washing. When you are out in public and use the restroom, wash your hands. When you are traveling on public transportation, as soon as you reach your destination, wash your hands. Eating out? Wash your hands before your meal comes. Many retail outlets and doctor’s offices now supply hand sanitizer. Use it! Flu viruses capable of being transferred to hands and causing an infection can survive on hard surfaces for *24 hours*.

**Number 3, don’t touch your face!** Putting your hands to your face is a good way to infect yourself with the virus. Flu viruses can enter the body through your nose, mouth and eyes.

**Number 4, get enough sleep!** Studies have shown that lack of sleep, for even just a few days, can weaken the immune system.

**Number 5, stay away from sick people!** If you know someone is ill, try to keep your distance. If the infected person is in your home, keep their towels, pillows, dishes and utensils separate. Disinfect surfaces with a disinfectant spray. Keep them isolated to one room, if possible, until the infection passes.

Sometimes, no matter how careful you are, someone in your household will get the flu. At the first sign of flu symptoms, get to your doctor. If you test positive, your doctor may be able to prescribe TamiFlu©, which will lessen symptoms and make for a quicker recovery.

Children are especially vulnerable this year. While the majority of children will be able to ride out symptoms and recover without incident, careful monitoring of kids with the flu is imperative. For most children, the flu starts with an abrupt spike in temperature, a sore throat, cough and muscle aches. Younger children may also have nausea and vomiting. In most healthy children, the illness will run its course relatively quickly. The fever will subside after three to four days, and the cough will stop within one to two weeks.

Children with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, heart conditions or seizures are also at increased risk for developing flu-related complications. The illness can also exacerbate their underlying medical problems.

According to the CDC, if you see the following symptoms in children with the flu, you should call for immediate medical care:

* Fast breathing or trouble breathing
* Bluish skin color
* Not drinking enough fluids
* Not waking up or not interacting
* Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
* Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
* Fever with a rash
* Clammy skin

If you see the above symptoms, don’t wait! Call 911.

As severe as this flu season is, the old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” never rang truer! A little caution and some common sense should get the majority of Americans through this outbreak safely.

For more tips on avoiding and dealing with the flu, the CDC has some excellent resources available at http://bit.ly/cdcflu18.

**Insert your Department name** relies on brave men and women to volunteer their time to serve as volunteer firefighters to ensure that every call for help is answered. Men and women with almost every skill set are needed. To learn more about volunteer opportunities, please contact **Insert your Department name at Insert website** or call **Insert your Dept. phone number**.

There are volunteer opportunities at your local volunteer fire department for citizens willing to work hard. To learn more about becoming a volunteer firefighter and joining your local volunteer fire department, please visit [www.VolunteerFireTN.org](http://www.VolunteerFireTN.org).

***About the Tennessee Fire Chiefs Association, Inc. (TFCA)****The TFCA provides leadership to career and volunteer Fire Chiefs, Chief Fire Officers and managers of emergency service organizations throughout the State of Tennessee through vision, information, education, service and representation to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The TN Fire Chiefs Association (TFCA) also encourages the professional advancement of the fire service to ensure and maintain greater protection of life and property from fire and natural or man-made disasters. The TFCA’s mission is to provide leadership to career and volunteer chiefs, chief fire officers, and managers of Emergency Service Organizations throughout the State of Tennessee through vision, information, education, service and representation to enhance their professionalism and capabilities. More information about the TFCA is located at* [*www.tnfirechiefs.com*](http://www.tnfirechiefs.com) *.*

***About Volunteer Workforce Solutions (VWS)****The Tennessee Fire Chiefs Association was awarded a SAFER recruitment and retention grant in 2016 and partnered with* [*the International Association of Fire Chiefs*](file:///C:\Users\jim.philipps\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\66B5AV63\iafc.org) *to identify recruitment and retention goals, strategies and marketing methodologies that would benefit not only participating departments, but all fire departments in the state. 19 departmental groups, consisting of 64 departments, were selected to participate in Phase I of the program. The VWS program is also operating in North Carolina through the North Carolina Fire Chiefs Association, Virginia through the Virginia Fire Chiefs Association and Connecticut through the Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association. There is also currently a National VWS effort focusing on diversity and new trainings. More information about the Tennessee VWS can be found at* [*www.VolunteerFireTN.org*](http://www.VolunteerFireTN.org)*.*

*(Insert info about your department in similar format to above)*