Influenza

Influenza can be dangerous, especially for people with underlying health problems. It’s important to understand how to deal with this common ailment.

What’s Going Around? is written by Erin Swiggum. Erin is a Family Nurse Practitioner for Vernon Memorial Healthcare. The series is intended to inform people about common yet important health issues. Erin is passionate about urgent medicine and throughout her career has generally focused on acute patient care. She has lived in the area her entire life and pursued medicine because of her desire to provide care to those in need.

Influenza

Influenza is a virus that causes fever, cough and body aches. There may be other associated symptoms such as sneezing, sore throat and headache. Fever is usually higher than 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

What are the symptoms?

If you think your child might have the flu, treat symptoms with Tylenol and rest; drink plenty of fluids and stay home, try not to spread it to others. Do not give your child Aspirin.

You should bring your child in if they are having any of the following:

• Breathing fast; trouble breathing
• Change in color (blue or purple)
• They are not taking in enough fluids
• Will not wake up or interact with you
• So unhappy they don’t want to be held
• Gets better from the flu but then gets sick again with fever or cough

Most people get over the flu without any lasting problems. Symptoms generally last 1-2 weeks. We can test for the flu, often in the beginning of the season. Once we know that it is prevalent in the community we stop testing and diagnose based on symptoms.

How is it treated and prevented?

You can prevent the flu by getting a vaccine. There are also many misconceptions about the flu vaccine causing the flu or other serious problems. The flu vaccine does not cause the flu, it might trigger a small immune reaction causing very mild flu like symptoms or pain in the arm where the shot was given. Again, The flu shot will not cause influenza. Influenza can also be treated with an antiviral medication. Generally, the antiviral is not necessary for healthy children.

CDC recommendations for people that use the antiviral medication:

• Children aged younger than 2 years
• Adults aged 65 years and older
• Persons with chronic diseases including asthma
• Persons with immunosuppression, including those caused by medications or by HIV infection; people undergoing chemotherapy/radiation treatment.
• Women who are pregnant or postpartum (within 2 weeks after delivery)
• Persons aged younger than 19 years who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
• Persons who are morbidly obese (i.e., body mass index is equal to or greater than 40)
• Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities