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What to do to fight the flu

Special edition, for subscribers of the
PRHI Executive Summary

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This edition of the *PRHI Executive Summary* departs from the usual content. In response to the flu vaccine shortage, the Allegheny County Health Department, Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative and dozens of partner institutions, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have mobilized a public-information campaign.

Simply stated, our goal is to have no more cases of influenza in Pittsburgh this year than in years past when plenty of vaccine has been available. We seek to make Southwestern Pennsylvania the region with the lowest flu rate in the country. How?

The attached brochure can go a long way to spread the message of flu prevention. We urge everyone to read the brochure and follow the precautions themselves. We are also asking leaders to disseminate the brochure as widely as possible—to all fellow employees and leaders, friends and family.

If you would like to reprint the brochure, please download a free, ready-to-print version from either the PRHI website, www.prhi.org/wpapers.cfm, (Consumer Information), or from the ACHD website, www.achd.net.

We hope you will join the effort to keep flu prevention in the forefront of public discussion. The issue of contagion—not just of flu, but of illness and infection in general—is becoming more and more important in our workplaces, homes and hospitals. (See one recent example at <http://www.cnn.com/2004/HEALTH/11/25/birdflu.warning/index.html>).

By pursuing this public discussion now, when the flu is a publicly acknowledged threat, we can begin to reinforce the basics of hygiene and prevention that will keep everyone healthier, flu season or no.

We hope this brochure can represent the beginning of a regional partnership to advance the public discussion of healthy practices and lessen the threat from the flu.

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FLU DOS AND DON'TS

Photos by Bill Wade, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
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<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/04335/418951.stm>

DO ↓



When you sneeze or cough, direct your head down and away from people around you and surfaces people might



Wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer before you touch any part of your face, before eating, and after blowing your nose.



If you have a fever and or coughing or sneezing, get out the ice pack and cough drops and stay home.

DON'T



Cold and flu bugs enter through the eyes, nose and mouth, so keep your fingers away from your face.



When handling glassware, don't let your fingers touch the rim, where germs could spread to someone's mouth.



As a "Seinfeld" episode hilariously detailed, double dipping is bad. And avoid any dish that you've seen someone dipping into twice.

Caring for you . . .

Over 70 health care institutions are part of this collaborative effort to reduce the transmission of influenza in Southwestern Pennsylvania in this critical year. They include:

- ✧ The Allegheny County Health Department
- ✧ Southwest district of the Pennsylvania Department of Health
- ✧ Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative
- ✧ Jewish Healthcare Foundation
- ✧ West Penn Allegheny Health System
- ✧ University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
- ✧ Pittsburgh Mercy Health System
- ✧ Heritage Valley Health System
- ✧ Jefferson Regional Medical System
- ✧ Westmoreland Health System
- ✧ Uniontown Hospital
- ✧ The Children's Institute
- ✧ and other regional health care institutions.

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Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative



What to do to fight the flu

*The flu vaccine shortage
does not have to be a crisis.*

*Can people in our region work together
to minimize the flu through vigilance and
old-fashioned hygiene?*

Fall 2004

What to do to fight the flu

The 2004 vaccine shortage

Unexpectedly, the United States finds itself facing the 2004 flu season with an inadequate supply of flu vaccine. The vaccine that exists is being reserved for people in high-risk categories:

- ✧ All children aged 6-23 months.
- ✧ Adults aged 65 years and older.
- ✧ Persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions.
- ✧ All women who will be pregnant during the influenza season.
- ✧ Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities.
- ✧ Children aged 6 months-18 years on chronic aspirin therapy.
- ✧ Healthcare workers involved in direct patient care.
- ✧ Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged less than 6 months.

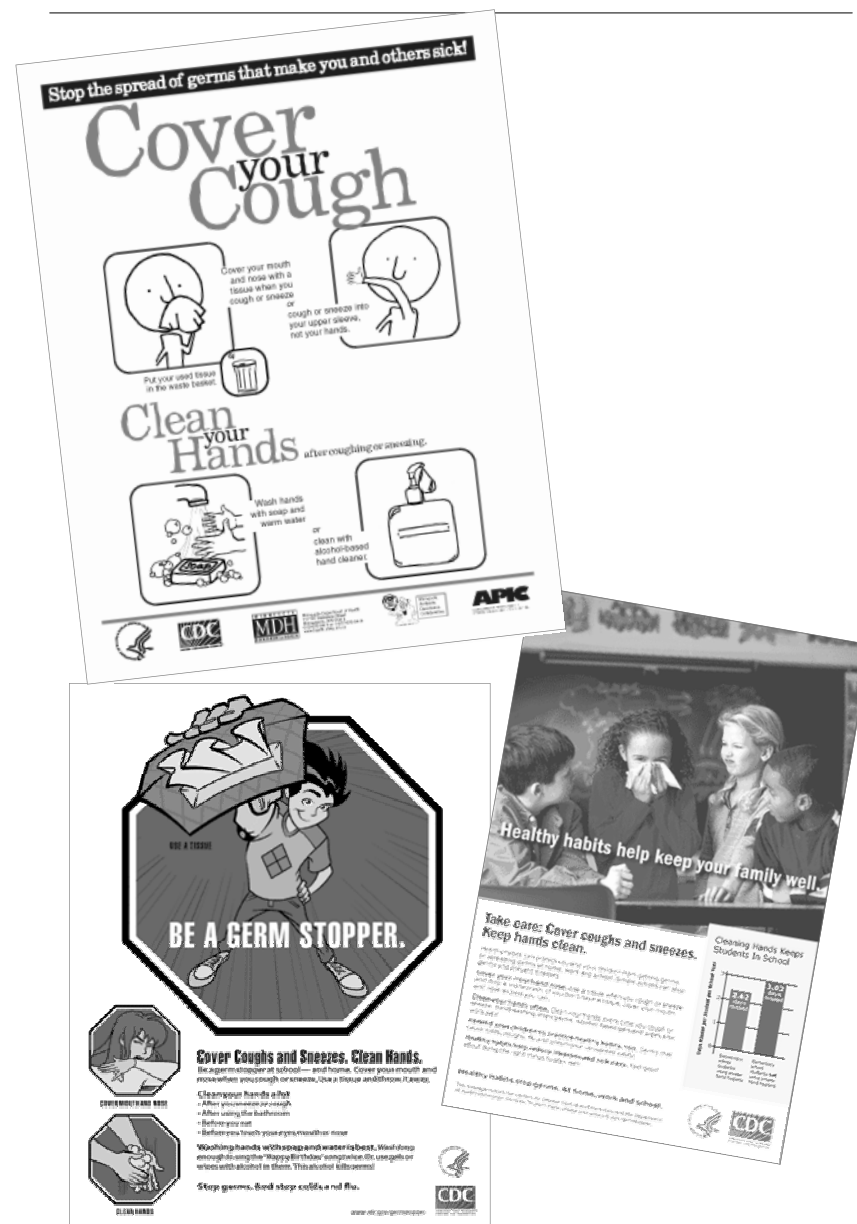
As additional supplies of flu vaccine become available, hospitals and public health officials will continue their efforts to provide vaccine to high-risk groups.

But what does this mean for the rest of us?

Influenza (Flu)

Protect Yourself & Your Loved Ones

More information is available at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccineshortage.htm#who>



These and other posters are available at the CDC's website. Encourage your employer and your child's school to post them prominently in areas where employees and students congregate.

- ❖ **Ask your employer, daycare provider and athletic club** to consider these measures in areas where people congregate:
 - **Install hand sanitizer** in restrooms, kitchens and common areas.
 - **Post visual alerts.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has downloadable posters that anyone can use (*see facing page*). See: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flugallery/posters.htm>.
- ❖ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.** The flu is often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with the flu virus and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. Some germs, like the flu virus, can live for two hours or more on objects and surfaces.
- ❖ **Offer a smile and a nod** instead of a handshake. Spread the word, not the flu: let people know why your greeting won't include a handshake this winter.
- ❖ **Observe public hygiene.** Dispose appropriately of items containing personal secretions (such as gum, cigarettes and expectorant) —never on public sidewalks.
- ❖ **Keep yourself and your family healthy.** This winter, it will be especially important to practice good health habits. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.

Our region's goal

The hospitals of southwestern Pennsylvania, in collaboration with the Allegheny County Health Department and the southwest district of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, are working to lessen the impact of influenza in light of reduced supplies of flu vaccine. They offer the following advice and information, in the hope that residents of the Pittsburgh region will answer the call to work together to defend our community against influenza.

Our goal is to have no more cases of influenza in Pittsburgh this year than in years past when plenty of vaccine has been available.

How the flu spreads

Influenza is an upper respiratory disease caused by a virus that is expelled into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It usually spreads from person to person, although it's possible to become infected by touching something with virus on it and then touching your nose or mouth.

Note: People who have been immunized can still pass the virus.

When to call your doctor

Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, extreme fatigue, dry cough, sore throat. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea also may occur, but are more common among children than adults.

Contact your doctor for medical advice and treatment. Your doctor may prescribe anti-viral drugs to lessen the severity and duration of the illness, but they are effective only when taken within 24 to 48 hours after symptoms appear.



A flu epidemic is not inevitable!

The Allegheny County Health Department and area hospitals are working together to:

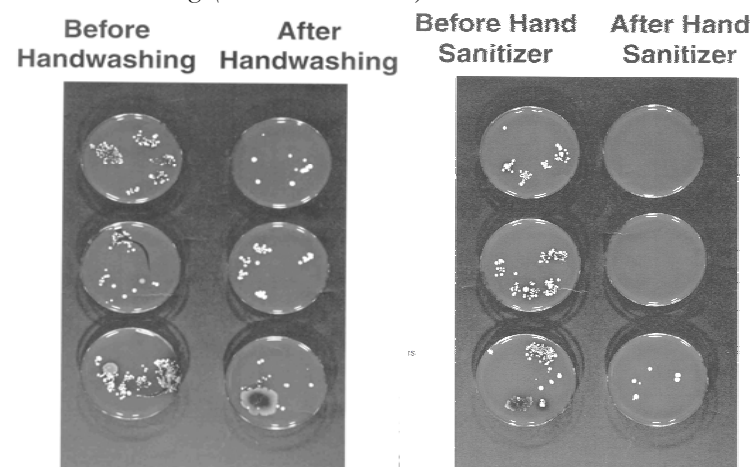
- Ensure that healthcare institutions and workers are prepared, paying special attention to hygienic precautions to ensure that vulnerable patients and the workers who care for them are protected.
- Make citizens aware of their role by helping in efforts like this brochure.

But everyone has a role to play in preventing the spread of the flu.

Simple measures of hygiene and etiquette can go a long way toward preventing the transmission of the flu. If everyone follows the guidelines, cases of the flu will be reduced across our community.

- ❖ ***Stay home if you are sick, and keep sick children at home.*** People may infect others one day before they show symptoms, and up to 7 days after getting sick. If someone begins to feel ill, keep that person at home.

- ❖ ***Do not visit*** people in hospitals, nursing homes and long-term care facilities if you suspect that you might be coming down with the something. Honor the request of your healthcare institution regarding number and ages of visitors.
- ❖ ***Keep your distance*** from others—especially the elderly, the very young, pregnant women and those with chronic medical conditions—when you are sick or if you think you may be coming down with something.
- ❖ ***Cover your mouth*** and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw it away immediately. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.
- ❖ ***Sanitize your hands often***, especially after coughing or sneezing. If your hands are soiled or have secretions on them, wash them with soap and water, rubbing your hands vigorously together and scrubbing all surfaces. Consider using an alcohol-based hand rub for routine cleaning. *(See illustration below.)*



When your hands are visibly dirty or have secretions on them, wash them thoroughly with soap and water. Otherwise, the CDC recommends using alcohol-based hand gel for routine sanitation.