

Don't be fooled, it's not too late for a flu shot

Each year, for the last 35 years, the flu has peaked in February. There is no evidence that this season will be any different.

The flu shot takes less than two weeks to produce effective immunity, so if you haven't had the time for your flu shot yet this season, it's not too late. We need to ensure the vaccination of as many people as possible over the course of several months as flu seasons vary in terms of length and severity.

Georgia is one of seven states already experiencing a peak in influenza-like activity. We are beginning to see sporadic influenza outbreaks, so the more intense flu season is almost upon us. Our region is experiencing influenza positive tests that have identified the flu species A, B and some H1N1.

So far, the species identified are matching the flu vaccine currently available, which means this season's flu shot will protect you against the three most likely strains of influenza to cause illness this season. That is great news. It means you can easily protect



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yourself against the flu.

Seasonal influenza, or "the flu," is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. It is spread between people and causes mild to severe illness, and can even cause death.

About 5 percent to 20 percent of U.S. residents get the flu each year, and more than 200,000 are hospitalized due to flu related complications.

The flu is typically spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes or otherwise spreads droplets full of germs that land in another person's mouth or nose (yuck).

Flu germs can live on surfaces like countertops and doorknobs for some time, and you can get the flu by touching an object infected with flu droplets then touching your mouth or your nose or even rubbing your eyes.

Uncomplicated influenza illness symptoms last one to two weeks. A person is contagious about one day before they even

know they are sick. Frightening? Yes. Preventable? Absolutely.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says a flu vaccine is the first and best way to guard against the flu. The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get the flu vaccine every year, as soon as seasonal vaccine is available.

It is here now! Vaccination is currently in progress and will continue until spring. There is still time. It's not too late. Get vaccinated today.

Most doctors' offices, pharmacies and urgent care centers are giving flu shots in Richmond Hill and some are offering a discount. No appointment is ever needed at an urgent care center. Walk in at your convenience seven days a week.

According to the CDC, despite the overwhelming logic for immunization against influenza, we have a terrible record for that in the United States. Why aren't people getting immunized? The reasons vary. Because a flu shot confers immunity for only one

year, many people see it as an annual bother. Others are afraid of needles, although there is now a new nasal spray alternative, called FluMist, for them.

The major reasons people don't get immunized, however, stem from a set of widely held myths about the flu. Unless you are one of the rare people who are truly not able to receive the vaccine, there really is no reason to avoid getting your flu shot.

Vaccination is the best protection against contracting the flu. Even if spending a week violently sick and bedridden doesn't worry you, by immunizing yourself you will greatly decrease the chances you will spread the virus.

For more information, talk to your health care provider or visit www.cdc.gov/flu and www.theucconline.com.

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