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GET YOUR FLU VACCINE AND KEEP YOUR HANDS CLEAN ARE THE MESSAGES THIS WEEK

MORGANTOWN, WV – (DECEMBER 1, 2017)

The holiday season is in full swing. There are parties to attend, trees to decorate, cookies to bake and presents to buy. The last thing revelers want is to get sick.

This week is a great time to focus on two ways to stay well this winter—get your flu vaccine and keep your hands clean. It is National Influenza Vaccine Week from Dec. 3 to 9 and National Handwashing Awareness Week from Dec. 4 to 10.

The resounding message of National Influenza Vaccine Week is that it’s not too late to get your flu shot. It takes about two weeks for the antibodies that fight the flu to develop so anyone who gets the vaccine soon should be fully protected before the relatives begin visiting.

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

A yearly flu vaccine is important because protection can wane. Also, circulating flu strains can change from year to year. This year’s flu vaccine is a quadrivalent inoculation, which means that it protects against the four strains of influenza that health officials believe will be the most prevalent during the 2017-2018 flu season. Included in this year’s vaccine are two A strains, including H1N1, as well as two B strains.

Just about everyone can get the flu vaccine, especially younger folks over the age of 6 months, those who are 65 and older, pregnant women and people with conditions that weaken their immune system. Exceptions include babies under the age of 6 months. People with egg allergies should discuss the flu vaccine with their health care provider to determine if they should get one.
Most people who get the flu recover in a week or two. However, the flu can cause complications, especially in senior citizens and people with other health conditions, including diabetes. Complications can include pneumonia and bronchitis. Some flu complications lead to death. The number of hospitalizations due to flu varies from season to season. In recent years, that number has been as low as 140,000 and as high as 710,000, according to the CDC.

The Monongalia County Health Department still has flu vaccine available. The cost of the vaccine is $25. MCHD is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. You can make an appointment to get a flu shot by calling 304-598-5119.

The second important item in your arsenal to fight the flu is washing your hands. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov), handwashing is a "do-it-yourself" vaccine—it involves five simple and effective steps. They include wet, lather, scrub, rinse and dry.

Washing your hands well with soap and water, especially before activities such as cooking and eating and after such activities as going to the bathroom, picking up animal droppings or sneezing or coughing, is one of the best ways to remove germs, avoid getting sick and prevent spreading germs to others. It’s quick, it’s simple and it can help keep everybody from getting sick.

The CDC recommends scrubbing hands for at least 20 seconds—about the length of time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice. The CDC even has posted a handy video of good hand-washing techniques, which can be accessed at cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html. If you get a flu vaccine and keep your hands clean, you will have a better chance of staying well and helping to keep others around you healthy too.

To make an appointment for a flu vaccine, call 304-598-5119. Check out monchd.org for more information.

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