Stay Healthy this Flu Season

Flu season is here, and we want you to stay healthy this winter. Each year approximately 5% to 20% of the U.S. population get the flu and some are even hospitalized as a result. It is important for you to know how to prevent the flu and what is covered under your TRICARE® pharmacy benefit.

What is the flu?
Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a highly contagious, viral infection easily spread from person-to-person. Adults can infect others 1 day before even showing symptoms and as long as 5 days after getting sick. Symptoms range from mild to severe.

When is flu season?
Flu season typically starts in the fall and peaks in January or February.

Who is considered high risk for flu-related complications?
While everyone is at risk of getting the flu, some people are at an increased risk for flu-related complications, including:
- Young children
- Pregnant Women
- People with asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease
- People aged 65 or older
- People with compromised immune systems

How does the flu spread?
The flu is spread person-to-person by sneezing, coughing or contact with saliva. You can also get the flu by touching surfaces with germs on them and then touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

How to prevent the flu:
There are several different ways you can prevent getting the flu. Follow these guidelines to stay healthy this flu season.

Get vaccinated – The flu shot is the first and most effective way to prevent infection. While there are many types of flu viruses, the flu shot protects against 3 or 4 types identified to be common each season. You can get vaccinated at no cost to you. For more information, visit http://www.tricare.mil/HealthWellness/Preventive/FluResources.aspx.

Who should get the flu shot?
Everyone 6 months or older should be vaccinated against the flu as soon as the shot is available in your area. It’s important for you to be vaccinated if you live with or care for high risk people. Infants who are younger than 6 months old are considered high risk, but are too young to receive the flu vaccination.

Getting the flu shot can reduce flu illness, visits to the doctor, missed school or work, as well as the possibility of a hospital stay. A flu shot can also lessen the severity of the illness if you do become infected.

**Preventing the flu through every day actions**
Practice good health habits to help build your body’s resistance to infection. These are a few ways build your immunity:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get enough rest and sleep.

In addition to keeping your body’s immunity levels strong, you can follow these common sense actions to help prevent the spread of germs:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover your nose and mouth with tissues when you sneeze or cough. Don’t have a tissue? Sneeze or cough into the crook of your elbow.
- Stay home from school or work when sick.

**Preventative antiviral medications**
Antiviral medication is available if:

- You currently have the flu. These medications, such as Tamiflu, can make your illness milder and shorter. They are most effective if taken within two days of getting sick, but can still help if taken later, especially if you are at high risk for complications.
- You have been exposed to someone with the flu or are caring for someone with the flu to help prevent you from becoming infected.

Your TRICARE pharmacy benefit covers the following antiviral influenza medications:

- Amantadine
- Rimantadine HCL
- Oseltamivir (generic for Tamiflu)

**Caring for someone with the flu**
If someone you live with or care for has the flu you’ll want to:

- Make sure that person follows all instructions given to them by their health care provider and takes all medications prescribed to them.
- Place the sick person in an area separate from other members of the household.
- Ensure everyone in the household washes their hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

To learn more about medications covered by your TRICARE pharmacy benefit, visit www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Pharmacy.

Seasonal flu is highly contagious and can affect anyone of any age group. Be sure to protect yourself this flu season.