

Take Time to Take Care

As a child growing up, my parents would both reprimand me if I said the word “hate.” They said it was too strong of a word to use recklessly and that too many people have been hurt or have died because of hate. Over time, I began to understand the danger in feeling that way about anything or anybody. That being said, I have to say I very nearly hate getting a shot – that is until March of 2012 when I nearly died from contracting the flu.

I began my downhill spiral with a headache and fever, but it quickly overtook my body and the pain from my body aches was beyond comprehension. I ended up at the emergency room where they gave me IV fluids, took blood, and yes, gave me a shot. However, I was so terribly sick at that point that I simply didn't care what they did to me. After a few hours, I started to bounce back and feel like I might make it through the day. The next day was even better, and I naively thought I could simply tough it out enough to go back to work. However, I broke every rule I know about what NOT to do when you are sick.

Six days later, I was in my doctor's office in the middle of a work day wondering how I would ever be able to drive myself home. My doctor knows me well and has always been candid and supportive while meeting my health care needs. I'll never forget what she said to me. “Deb, you can't tough your way through this, if you don't go on complete bed rest, you can die from the flu virus you have!” What she didn't say was “I told you so!” After all, she had recommended that I get a flu shot earlier that winter and I politely declined as I “very nearly hate getting shots!”

The flu is a very serious contagious disease that can lead to hospitalization or even death. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the month of February consistently has had the highest number of reported cases of flu over any other month out of the year. The Center goes on to recommend that each of us take action to protect ourselves and others from this hard-hitting illness.

Our first line of defense is by getting the flu vaccination. This is first and most important step in protecting against the flu. The vaccine that is administered protects against the three viruses that are expected to be most common during the flu season. Everyone age 6 months and older should get vaccinated. You can choose between the flu shot or a flu mist. I got my flu shot (yes, a shot!) the first week of January after being worried I had missed my window of opportunity. An earlier shot wasn't an option due to other normal winter illnesses running through my family. My doctor suggested I wait until we were sure I was healthy. If you haven't had your flu vaccination it's not too late for you to get one. As I prepared to write this column, I called the Geary County Health Department and they assured me they had an ample supply of the flu vaccine.

Our second line of defense against the flu virus is active preventative steps.

- Wash your hands with soap and water. The general rule is that you should scrub with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds every time you wash your hands and you should wash your hands often. You don't have to use antibacterial soap. In a December 16, 2013 press release the U.S. Food and Drug Administration stated “Although consumers generally view these products as effective tools to help prevent the spread of germs, there is currently no evidence

that they are any more effective at preventing illness than washing with plain soap and water. Further, some data suggest that long-term exposure to certain active ingredients used in antibacterial products – for example, triclosan (liquid soaps) and triclocarban (bar soaps) – could pose health risks such as bacterial resistance or hormonal effects.

- Avoid being around sick people. If you know someone who has been sick and would like to visit them, use the “old fashioned” way of communicating by calling them on the phone.
- If you are feeling ill, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone (unless you need to seek medical help.) While you are ill, stay away from other people as much as possible. With the flu, you often feel so miserable that you don’t want to be around anyone anyhow. Wash your hands often so that you don’t accidentally spread the illness to your family.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when you sneeze. This is much better than coughing into your hand or elbow, both of which spread the germs out into the air. Always wash your hands with soap and water (for 20 seconds) after you dispose of the tissue.

All of us need to be aware of the risks we take when we are not proactive about our health and wellness during flu season and year round. I still nearly hate getting a shot, but I am committed in believing I hate the flu. Take time to take care of yourself and until next time – Keep living resourcefully!