Running from the Flu? CDU Alum Dr. John Uyanne Explains Infectious Diseases

Published on Friday, 16 January 2015 02:19
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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 43 states are having widespread flu activity. That's up from 36 states last week. This week, six more children have died after having the flu, the CDC said. People are feeling uneasy about being in crowds or traveling on crowded transport because of infectious diseases in the news. By this time, you have heard of many who have been stricken with Influenza (flu) or maybe it has gone through your household. In light of the recent cases of Ebola and the similarity of symptoms to flu, it is understandable that people are fearful of crowds and traveling.

Whichever, the flu virus certainly has your attention. To learn more about it we turn to John Uyanne, MD, MS, and a board certified Internist and Geriatrician. Dr. Uyanne is also an Assistant Professor of Medicine and Geriatrics at both Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (CDU) and UCLA. Currently practicing at the Martin Luther King Jr. Outpatient Center (MLK-OC), Dr. Uyanne is providing care to the indigenous underserved population in the Greater Los Angeles area. At MLK, Dr. Uyanne also serves as the Chairman of the Infection Control Committee.

Ebola is still very uncommon in the US. Thus far, only four cases of Ebola have been reported and only one has died.

The flu virus is much more common than Ebola. Millions of people are infected, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized and thousands die from the flu each year. That's why getting the flu shot has become an annual ritual.

What is the flu?

Influenza ("flu") is a respiratory illness that is easily transmitted from person to person. The flu infection is a serious disease that can result in hospitalization and sometimes death. Symptoms can range from mild to severe illness. Most individuals who get the flu have mild symptoms and recover in less than two weeks. However, there are some individuals who are more at risk of having severe complications of the flu, which may result in hospitalization or even death.
According to the Centers for Disease (CDC), the people at high risk for developing flu-related complications are:

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- Also American Indian and Alaskan Natives
- Those people who have medical conditions including Asthma, chronic lung disease (such as COPD, cystic fibrosis), heart disease (congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease), blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease), those individuals with weakened immune systems (HIV, or AIDS, cancer)

**How does one catch the flu?**

The flu virus spreads by air droplets when people with the flu sneeze or cough. Influenza can also be spread by direct contact.

The best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine every year especially during the flu season.

**Here are Dr. Uyanne’s tips for managing Flu:**

Presence of the following symptoms or complications of the flu should prompt you to seek medical attention. These symptoms include:

- Persistent flu-like symptoms with fever and cough
- Breathing difficulty or shortness of breath
- Sudden dizziness, confusion
- Persistent vomiting
- Seizures

To avoid spreading the contagious flu virus, people with flu should stay home and observe proper hygiene hand washing, using soap and water or alcohol based hand rub. Avoid sharing eating utensils, dishes, and linen. Steps should also be taken to properly disinfect surfaces frequently touched in the home, work and schools.
There are currently four antiviral drugs that are approved in USA for managing influenza. These drugs are Amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir, and zinamivir. These drugs are reserved for severe influenza cases requiring hospitalization especially in those with severe illness and are at risk of developing severe illness.

Cold remedies: if you catch a cold, you can expect to be sick for one to two weeks. These remedies may help: water and other fluids, juice, clear broth or warm lemon. Water with honey helps loosen congestion and prevents dehydration. Avoid alcohol, coffee and caffeinated sodas, which can make dehydration worse. Saltwater gargle can temporarily relieve a sore or scratchy throat. Saline nasal drops and sprays can relieve stuffiness and congestion.

Since Ebola is in the news, and often when you approach a medical facility you are asked about it, Dr. Uyanne includes a bit of information about other infectious diseases called enteroviruses:

**Ebola virus:** According to CDC the Ebola virus can be spread to others through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes in, for example, the eyes, nose, or mouth) with blood or body fluids of a person who is sick with Ebola. Ebola however is not transmitted by air, water and by food. Mosquitoes and other insects do not transmit Ebola.

Symptoms of Ebola usually appear from 2 to 21 days after exposure to Ebola. The symptoms are similar to flu: fever, headache, and muscle pain, diarrhea, and/or abdominal pain.

There is currently no approved vaccine for Ebola. Symptoms are treated as they appear. CDC recommends good supportive clinical care. Recovery also depends on the patient’s immune system. Patients who recover from Ebola go on to develop antibodies that may last 10 years. Prevention of outbreak is by wearing appropriate protective gear. The people at highest risk are health care workers caring for Ebola patients as well as family and friends who come in close contact with the Ebola patient.

CDC recommends that health care workers caring for Ebola patients wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) with full body coverage to reduce the risk of self-contamination.

**Enteroviruses:** These are small RNA viruses (contain ribonucleic acid). Poliovirus is an enterovirus. Another non-polio enterovirus is the coxsackievirus (coxsackie A and B viruses). Most people infected with enterovirus exhibit no disease. However, those who become ill usually develop Flu-like symptoms. Some of the symptoms include fever, muscle aches, rash with viral meningitis, myocarditis, encephalitis and paralysis, as less common complications.

There was a recent outbreak of infection with non-polio enterovirus; EV-D68. This outbreak was mostly in children with many resulting in hospitalization in the intensive care unit (ICU). According to CDC, this respiratory infection affected
children in 44 states and by early October, more than 620 people had been infected. At this time, there is no current vaccination for EV-D68. Practicing good hygiene is the best course of decreasing the spread.

Dr. Uyane completed his training in Internal Medicine at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, North General Hospital Program in New York in 1999. Dr. Uyane went on to specialize in Geriatric Medicine at the former King/Drew Medical Center. An alumnus of CDU, he also received a Master of Science degree in Clinical Research there in 2006.

Dr. Uyane has received several awards and scrolls from the Los Angeles Department of Health Services and Board of Supervisors in recognition of his excellence in patient care, clinical competency and peer interaction. These awards include LA County Super Star Award (2014), LA County Star Award (2013), Patient Safety Leader Award (Health Service, Los Angeles) and one from the County Quality Improvement and Safety Program 2010).

Also actively involved in research, Dr. Uyane is highly sought after to conduct presentations and town hall meetings to discuss current infections in our community.