



# ‘Cover Your Cough’ In Light of the Flu

From Parish Nurse Lorraine Dudley, RN

The Flu season is among us. If you haven't received the flu vaccine it is still available. Rice County Public Health has walk-in services every Tuesday from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.. The vaccine is free to those without insurance and \$30 for those with insurance. Walgreens will give the flu vaccine every day between 8:00 a.m. and 10 p.m. but the best hours to come are 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. This vaccine is for a flu that is different from the swine flu of the past years and not a vaccine for the gastrointestinal flu (Norovirus) which does not have a vaccine. You may also check with your personal health care provider for any vaccines.

The Minnesota Department of Health has compiled a list of basic questions and answers as part of the ‘Cover Your Cough’ campaign. The list provides information about the spread of disease and how to prevent it. **Flu episodes typically occur between November and April so start thinking of getting flu vaccine. This season has been an especially bad one.**

## Why should I cover my cough?

Serious respiratory illnesses like influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), whooping cough and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) are spread by coughing, sneezing and unclean hands. All of these illnesses spread easily in crowded places where people are in close contact.

## How can I stay healthy?

- ✓ Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- ✓ Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- ✓ Avoid close contact with people who are sick, if possible.
- ✓ Get vaccinated! Influenza (flu) and pneumococcal (pneumonia) vaccines can prevent some serious respiratory illnesses.

## How do I stop the spread of germs if I am sick?

- ✓ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue each time you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissue in the waste-basket.
- ✓ If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.
- ✓ After coughing or sneezing, always clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- ✓ If you get the flu, avoid exposing others. Stay home when you are sick.
- ✓ Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels or other personal items.

## Want to stay healthy? WASH YOUR HANDS!!!

Hand-washing is a quick, easy and effective way to reduce your chance of catching the flu and many other illnesses. To wash your hands properly:

- ✓ Use soap and running water.
- ✓ Wash the back of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- ✓ Rinse well after washing.
- ✓ Dry your hands with a single use towel, and use the towel to turn off the faucet.

When you're on the go, keep a small bottle of hand sanitizer in your car or purse. Hand sanitizers kill almost 100 percent of germs and are a good option when soap and water are available.



## What if you cannot avoid getting the flu?

- ✓ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ✓ Get plenty of rest.
- ✓ Ask your neighborhood pharmacist to assist you in choosing an over-the-counter flu medication for you.