Influenza is Dangerous
Get Your Annual Flu Shots Now

As fall begins, we move again into flu season. As I do every year, I urge everyone in our ‘ohana to be aware of the dangers and take steps to protect themselves and their families from the flu. I particularly recommend flu shots.

This year, for the first time in memory, people will need two separate shots. The first one will protect them against ordinary seasonal flu. The second one will protect them from the expected resurgence of the H1N1 flu virus, also known as swine flu.

The seasonal flu vaccine is ready now, and this coming week we will offer free flu shots to members of our ‘ohana who work in Waikiki at our annual Outrigger/OHANA Health Fair. (See article on page 2.)

The swine flu vaccine is not yet available; however, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believes it will be ready for distribution next month. We will keep you up-to-date and make free swine flu shots available as soon as possible.

Let’s look at some key facts about the flu. A slang name for influenza, flu is one of the oldest and most common diseases known. It is a viral illness that can produce many symptoms, including fever, cough, chills, and muscle aches. Some people may also experience nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Bronchitis and pneumonia, both potentially very serious, can easily develop as secondary infections.

Although flu symptoms are similar to those of the common cold, the two diseases are caused by different “bugs.” Flu is much more serious. According to the CDC, the seasonal flu – the kind that goes around during the cooler months – is responsible, on average, for the death of about 36,000 Americans each year.

Each winter, the seasonal flu virus re-emerges and spreads, usually as a newly-mutated or evolved strain. Some years, the new strain is comparatively mild, and relatively few people get sick. Other years, it is highly virulent, spreading rapidly and killing many, particularly young children and senior citizens. There is a wealth of information on seasonal flu available at www.cdc.gov/flu.

The CDC warns that because of swine flu, this year’s flu season could be worse than usual. The H1N1 virus may cause more people to get sick and cause more severe illness than we usually experience with ordinary seasonal flu. See the CDC report 2009 H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and You for more information (www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm).

That is why we will be making swine flu shots available too, as soon as possible.

Seasonal flu shots offer excellent, although not complete, resistance to the disease. They not only protect us from the current year’s flu, there is evidence that they strengthen our immunity over the years. There is also evidence that seasonal flu vaccination may provide some protection for pandemic flu.

Flu shots are especially important to people who work in Travel & Tourism. Travelers can carry the flu virus thousands of miles in only a few hours, rapidly turning a local outbreak into a global event. Travel industry workers who greet guests from all over the world are thus at greater risk of catching the flu.

I urge everyone to get their flu shots as soon as possible. Don’t delay. This is serious business. “Just do it.”

FLU SHOTS – Frequently Asked Questions
By Dr. Chuck Kelley

Why should I get the flu shot?
The flu shot will help protect you against catching the flu, which at the very least, would be a huge inconvenience and unpleasant experience. In the worst case, the flu can be deadly.

And don’t forget, you want to protect your family and loved ones. If you catch even a mild case of the flu, you will be highly contagious even before you realize you’re sick. This means you could spread the flu to your children, spouse, parents, friends, and others.

If I got my flu vaccine late last year, do I need another shot this year?
Yes. Why? Because the flu virus is continually mutating and evolving into new strains. So each year, flu vaccine is formulated differently in order to be effective against the new strains of the disease. In short, last year’s vaccination may not be effective against this year’s virus. That’s why we all need a new shot each year.

**Can the vaccine give me the flu?**

No, absolutely, positively not. There is no live virus in the vaccine.

**Who should get vaccinated?**

Anyone can benefit from getting the flu vaccine because it reduces the chances of developing the flu and its complications. We encourage all employees to get vaccinated. However, people who are at higher risk of developing flu-associated complications are especially encouraged to get their flu shot. If you belong to one of the groups below, it is especially important to talk to a health professional about getting the vaccine.

- Senior citizens, 65 or older
- Children, ages 6 months to 2 years
- People living in nursing homes or long-term-care facilities
- Those with chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma
- Those with other chronic conditions, such as diabetes or kidney disease
- Those with compromised immune systems (caused by autoimmune diseases, certain medications, or HIV infection)
- People with other conditions, such as seizure disorder or muscle disorders
- Pregnant women
- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season

**Who should NOT get vaccinated?**

The flu shot can be harmful to some people, including those who are severely allergic to chicken eggs, those who have developed serious allergic responses to the flu shot in the past, people who developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome within six weeks of getting a flu shot, and children under 6 months of age.

**Where can I get the shot if I am unable to make it to the Health Fair?**

For those of you who are able to come to Waikiki, our Human Resources department has made arrangements for you to receive your vaccine at Doctors On Call. There is no appointment needed, and it’s free.

On the neighbor islands, the Human Resources department is currently making arrangements with some of the local clinics and pharmacies. There will be no charge for employees. Details will be sent to your property managers shortly.

You always have the option of receiving the vaccine from your regular health care provider, but there may be an insurance co-pay or administration fee for which you will be responsible.

The Hawaii State Department of Health maintains a long list of providers on all islands who can administer the vaccine. Some locations are free; others require payment of an administration fee. The list can be viewed at: http://hawaii.gov/health/family-child-health/immunization/flu-shot-schedule.pdf.

If you are working at one of our properties outside the United States, contact your Human Resources department for information.

**How else can I protect myself from the flu?**

Besides getting the flu shot, you can avoid the disease by practicing good hygiene. For example:

1. **Wash your hands often with soap and water.** Frequently wash with soap for at least 15-20 seconds before rinsing, and rub your hands vigorously.
2. **Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or the inside of your elbow.** Germs are spread easily when we touch things with our hands. So try not to sneeze directly into your hands.
3. **Stay home from school or work if at all possible when you are sick.** Let’s not spread the germs around!
4. **Avoid coming in close contact with sick people.** Stay at least three feet away if at all possible.
5. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.**