Influenza Is Dangerous: Get Your Flu Shots Now
By Dr. Richard Kelley

These days, members of our ‘ohana who work at our Reservations Center in Denver and the Hilton Garden Inn Denver Airport are watching the leaves turn bright yellow and vivid red. The nights are cooler and the year’s first snow coated the ground about 10 days ago. As our Denver colleagues enjoy the beauty of the season, they and everyone else should remember – as fall begins, so does the dangerous and potentially deadly flu season.

I urge everyone in our ‘ohana from Denver, Colorado, to Phuket, Thailand, to be aware of the dangers of the influenza virus and take steps to protect themselves and their families from this disease. I particularly recommend the flu shot (immunization) – I got mine this week.

Influenza viruses are always mutating – evolving into new strains – so scientists have to work hard to develop a vaccine that will be effective in providing immunity against the viruses considered most likely to cause the flu each year.

Many of you will recall 2009 when the A/H1N1 strain of influenza, also known as “swine flu,” caused a flu pandemic (global outbreak), the first in more than 40 years. As a result, that year people needed two flu shots – one for the regular “seasonal” flu and a second one for the particularly dangerous A/H1N1 virus.

The 2012-2013 flu vaccine is ready now and this year only one injection is needed. During Outrigger’s annual Wellness Fair last month, flu shots were offered to members of our ‘ohana who work in Waikiki. If you missed the Wellness Fair, you may visit the Doctors On Call offices in Waikiki for a free flu shot; just bring your Outrigger I.D. Members of our ‘ohana on neighbor islands should see their department manager, who is being provided with a list of locations where free flu shots are conveniently available.

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

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

Continued on page 2
symptoms of the disease. Adults can infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, can infect others for even longer.

How serious is the flu?
Flu is unpredictable and how severe its outbreak is can vary widely from one season to the next depending on many things, including:

• which flu virus is prevalent
• how much flu vaccine is available
• when the vaccine becomes available
• how many people get vaccinated, and
• how well that year’s flu vaccine matches the season’s newly evolved flu viruses

Certain people are at greater risk for serious complications if they get the flu. This includes older people, young children, pregnant women, people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease), and residents of facilities like nursing homes.

Flu outbreaks are unpredictable and can be severe, even deadly. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that, over a period of 31 years, from the 1976-1977 season to the 2006-2007 season, flu-associated deaths in the United States each year ranged from about 3,000 to approximately 49,000 people.

To put that into perspective, automobile accidents killed an average of about 33,000 people in each of the two years 2009 and 2010 in the United States.

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. In other years, it is highly virulent, spreading rapidly and killing many, particularly young children and the elderly. There is a wealth of information on seasonal flu available at http://tinyurl.com/c22b2r6.

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 also strengthen our immunity over the years.

So get your flu shot and live well! ☺