A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

Flu kills many more people than Ebola

Over the past few weeks, the news has been dominated by breathless reports of a handful of individuals in the United States with an Ebola virus infection. That is certainly of concern, but unfortunately, we may be forgetting and neglecting a much greater danger – the influenza virus, which kills thousands of Americans every year, far more than Ebola kills even in Africa, where it has claimed most of its nearly 5,000 victims to date.

Influenza, the “flu,” has been with mankind for many, many years. When I was training in medicine in Boston in the late 1950s, I spoke with many people who could remember the 1918 influenza pandemic. Called the Spanish flu, it killed somewhere between 50 and 100 million people – 3-5 percent of the world’s population at the time – making it one of the world’s worst-ever medical disasters.

More recently, from the 1976–1977 flu season to the 2006-2007 flu season, annual flu-related deaths in the U.S. have ranged from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Worldwide, the flu kills about 250,000 to 500,000 – a quarter to half a million people – every year.

Influenza viruses are always mutating (evolving into new strains), so scientists have to work hard to develop a vaccine that will match the viruses considered most likely to cause the flu each year. It is always a high-stakes guessing game.

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

For the 2013-2014 flu season, most people received what is called a “trivalent” vaccine that offers protection against three viruses – two influenza A viruses and one influenza B virus. A new “quadrivalent” vaccine protecting against two influenza A and two influenza B viruses was also available in very limited supply.

For the current 2014-2015 flu season, both trivalent and quadrivalent injections are available and individuals should consult with their health care provider to determine which is best for them.

During Outrigger’s recent annual Wellness Fair, flu shots were offered to members of our Waikīkī ‘ohana. If you missed the Wellness Fair, here are steps you may take, depending on your health plan:

- **HMSA PPP** - Visit Doctors on Call in Waikīkī for a free flu shot – just bring your medical card, a government-issued photo ID, and your Outrigger ID; or visit a participating retail store. On O’ahu and most neighbor islands, these include Longs, Walgreens, Safeway pharmacies and Foodland pharmacies. For a complete list, please contact your HR representative.
- **HMSA HPH** - See your physician or health center.

Hospital ward filled with soldiers stricken with the Spanish flu at the U.S. Army’s Camp Funston, Kansas, during the pandemic of 1918.
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 employees 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 shots as soon as possible. Don’t delay. This is serious business.

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**FLU SHOTS – Frequently Asked Questions**

By Dr. Chuck Kelley

**Why should I get the flu shot?**

The flu shot will help protect you from the flu, which at the very least would be a huge inconvenience and unpleasant experience. In the worst case, the flu can be fatal.

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 before you even realize you’re sick. This means you could spread the flu to your children, spouse, parents, friends, co-workers 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 viruses. 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.

**When should I get the flu shot?**

Now. Getting the flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available each year is always a good idea, and the protection you get will last throughout the flu season.

**Who should get vaccinated?**

CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. We encourage all employees to get vaccinated.

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 particularly important to talk to a health professional about getting the vaccine.

- People with asthma
- People with diabetes
- People 65 and older
- People who have HIV or AIDS
- People who have cancer
- Children younger than 5, and especially children younger than 2.

**Who should NOT get vaccinated?**

The flu shot can be harmful to a tiny minority of 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 was unable to make it to the Health Fair?**

For those of you in Waikīkī, 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. Remember to bring your medical card, photo ID and Outrigger ID.

At this time of year, many pharmacies throughout the state, including Costco, Longs Drugs, Times, Safeway, Foodland, CVS, Walgreens and more, offer walk-in flu shots and accept insurance payments often without any out-of-pocket cost. A complete list of these pharmacies, compiled by the Department of Health, can be found at: [http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/files/2013/05/flushotschedule.pdf](http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/files/2013/05/flushotschedule.pdf).

Both HMSA members and Kaiser members have the option of receiving the vaccine from their primary care provider. They may sometimes (not always) be charged an office visit co-pay.

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

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

Besides getting the flu shot, you can minimize your chances of catching the disease by practicing good hygiene. For example:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Wash with soap for at least 15-20 seconds before rinsing, and rub your hands vigorously. (If you’ve grabbed a doorknob or stairway hand railing, you’ve almost certainly picked up millions of germs and viruses. Be sure to wash before you handle any food, dishes or utensils!)
- 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.
- Stay home from school or work if at all possible when you are sick. Let’s not spread the germs around!
- Avoid coming in close contact with sick people. Stay at least three feet (1 meter) away if at all possible.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.