

Dr. Michelle Simon, ND PhD

6300 Ninth Ave NE, Suite 310

Seattle, WA 98115

(206) 524-0863

www.drnichellesimon.com

This season, "swine flu" or the H1N1 flu will undoubtedly affect many of us. However, this need not be the case. There are many things that you and your family can do to make sure you are as prepared as possible. I will outline some of my suggestions in this newsletter. If you have any questions, please feel free to come in for an appointment to address your concerns.

H1N1 Virus: Symptoms: Usually include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose muscle aches, and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting.

While this flu spreads very easily, it has a fairly low fatality rate for flu and as of this writing it has not mutated to a more virulent form of the virus¹. As of August 28th, 2009 the World Health Organization (WHO) had laboratory confirmation of just over 250,000 cases with just over 2,000 deaths reported. The actual number of infected persons is estimated to be much higher than the number of confirmed cases. At this point, the swine flu is considered a moderate virus. Every year seasonal flu kills between 250,000 and 500,000 people globally. This year the number is expected to be higher due to the high transference rate of H1N1 which will result in a larger number of affected people. The WHO estimates the virus could eventually affect 2 billion people.² For more information, the CDC provides an excellent resource online to address questions and answers about the H1N1 virus:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm>.

It is recommended that you prepare for the potential that you or someone in your family will contract the virus, either the H1N1 or another seasonal flu virus by stocking

¹ Nebehay, S. H1N1 has killed 2,837, but not more serious: WHO. Reuters online, Sept 4, 2009.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSTRE5831VJ20090904>

² Preparing for the Second Wave: Lessons from Current Outbreaks. WHO Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 Briefing Note 9. August, 2009.
http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/notes/h1n1_second_wave_20090828/en/index.html

up on supplies beforehand. Some supplies could include: pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough remedies, fluids with electrolytes and vitamins. Emergen-C is a great source of vitamin C and electrolytes, for example. In addition, this newsletter will provide **more recommendations** for remedies to have on hand.

Prevention, prevention, prevention.

The first consideration is **Hygiene**. There are important daily practices that everyone should employ to reduce the transmission of the H1N1 virus (or any flu virus).

1. **Cover your mouth and nose** when you sneeze or cough with a tissue and dispose of it after use. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow rather than your hands.
2. **Wash your hands frequently.** Especially if you have been in contact with a large group of people at school, shopping, or traveling for example, or after coughing or sneezing. You may also use alcohol based hand cleaners.
3. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.** The vast majority of flu transmission, some estimates of up to 80%, occurs through contact from hands to mucus membranes of the face, such as rubbing an eye or a nose.
4. Try to **avoid close contact** with sick people.
5. If you become sick, stay home. The CDC recommends that you **stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone** (without the use of fever reducing medications).

Vitamin D: This is, in my opinion, the most important immune supportive measure you can take. If you haven't had your blood level of vitamin D checked by me recently, call the office to arrange it. I really cannot stress enough how important this one supplement is to the overall function of your immune system. Living in the Pacific Northwest precludes us from maintaining an adequate level of vitamin D. Fairly high levels of supplementation are required. I know I have been stressing this for several years by now, but if my message hasn't reached you, let me know! It is important for everyone in your household. Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin and so you can take

too much. Blood level monitoring is necessary to make sure you are getting the appropriate amount. The usual scenario is a period of high dosing for 6 to 12 weeks and then a maintenance dose to keep the level in the optimal range.

Vitamin D is important for proper immune system functioning, for the prevention of seasonal affective disorder, and for optimal calcium metabolism. Lack of sunlight in the Northwest is a contributing factor to the high rate of osteoporosis we see here. Additionally, vitamin D is now implicated in prevention of cancer, specifically breast and colon. Since it is a fat soluble vitamin, it can be dosed weekly, instead of daily, helping with compliance.

Probiotics: an interesting double blind, placebo controlled study published in August this year in the journal *Pediatrics*³ showed that by supplementing children age 3-5 with a combination of lactobacillus acidophilus and bifidobacterium (a food source for the lactobacillus) the incidence of cold and flu was dramatically reduced. In fact, the combination **reduced fever incidence by 72%, coughing incidence by 62% and runny nose by 58.8%**. I certainly recommend this combination supplement for all children and many adults as an immune system stimulant.

Homeopathy: There are a couple of specific homeopathic remedies that I will recommend. One is called Oscillococcinum, many pharmacies and food stores like Whole Foods have their own private label remedies. These are specifically designed to help with the prevention and treatment of flu. The best approach is to take a dose once weekly during flu season, I would start now. Then, at the earliest sign of flu, dose again every 4 hours for the next day. Then daily thereafter. Another homeopathic that helps with the fatigue and body pain of flu is called Gelsemium. This is taken 2-4 times daily while symptoms persist.

³ Leyer GJ, Li S, Mubasher ME, Reifer C, Ouwehand AC. Probiotic effects on cold and influenza-like symptom incidence and duration in children. *Pediatrics*. **2009** Aug;124(2):e172-9. Epub 2009 Jul 27.

Sleep: In an Archives of Internal Medicine in January 2009 article, the authors examined the sleep habits of 153 men and women and related it to their immune function by exposing them to a rhinovirus. Those who averaged 7 or less hours of sleep per night in the 2 weeks prior to exposure were 2.94 times or almost **3x more likely to develop a cold** from the exposure than those with 8 hours or more of sleep⁴. I know I stress sleep with everyone, and its importance to optimal immune system functioning is a large part of the reason why!

Zinc: Zinc is an essential immune system component. Most folks that I test in the office for zinc status are deficient (if you want to be tested, let me know!). I believe that supplementing with zinc during the cold and flu season is critical. Zinc is essential for multiple cellular functions including immunity⁵. There are many studies supporting the use of zinc in diarrhea of children, acute lower respiratory tract infections, and the common cold and pneumonia among many others. Zinc has been shown to reduce the incidence of respiratory tract infections among children. I recommend between 30 and 60 mg per day.

Vitamin A is an important nutrient for immune function as well, I recommend 50,000 IU daily.

Hydration: It is important to remain hydrated for both prevention and treatment of the flu. Anytime a person has a fever, the body will become more dehydrated and rehydration is an important treatment. One of the best ways to rehydrate is with chicken or vegetable broth. The electrolytes in these fluids are excellent at

⁴ Cohen S, Doyle WJ, Alper CM, Janicki-Deverts D, Turner RB. *Arch Intern Med*. Sleep habits and susceptibility to the common cold. **2009** Jan 12;169(1):62-7.

⁵ Prasad AS. Zinc in human health: effect of zinc on immune cells. *Mol Med*. **2008** May-Jun;14(5-6):353-7.

rehydrating the body much more effectively than other fluids. Our grandmothers were right.

Diet: General guidelines for immune boosting diet are to avoid refined carbohydrates (white wheat products), simple sugars and fruit juices. Eat plenty of nutrient rich whole foods. Get adequate protein daily.

Vaccination: A H1N1 vaccine will be available in the coming months. It is a new vaccine and because of the speed to market, little testing was possible with regard to medium or long term consequences. It is being recommended for the most vulnerable people such as pregnant women, people with chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, heart and lung disease, and the elderly. Health care workers and those who work with high risk populations are also recommended to receive the vaccine. If you must get the vaccine, I recommend the inhalant version vs. the injectible as there are fewer additives. I believe that adequate rest, hydration, and immune system support is a better overall strategy to avoiding the flu this season, whether it is the H1N1 or any other seasonal flu.

Treatment

Botanical remedies. The H1N1 flu causes a characteristic bone pain. For this symptom I recommend **Boneset** (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*). It is indicated in fevers associated with bone pain. It also helps release the heat of a fever by inducing sweating. This herbal is best taken as a tea, but also great in tincture form. If you feel that you are getting the flu, I recommend 10 drops 3x daily. It shouldn't be taken long term, however, due to its potential cumulative effect on the liver.

Steam with Eucalyptus. To help open respiratory airways, use 5 drops of eucalyptus oil in hot water and inhale the steam. This works best by using a steam shower, or leaning over a pot of boiled water with a towel over the head to enhance the steam inhalation.

Sambucus, or Black Elderberry, is useful for the treatment of coughs and fevers associated with colds and flus.

Lobelia: Another characteristic of the H1N1 virus is its ability to quickly move into the respiratory system potentially causing bronchitis and pneumonia. For this I recommend Lobelia (*Lobelia spp*). Lobelia is a great antispasmodic, expectorant, and sedative. This wonderful but strong herb helps with the coughing and chest constriction that often accompanies flu but is not for everyone. Small drop doses are best since it can cause vomiting and is not recommended in those with heart disease. As with all the botanicals, if you have questions about a specific treatment plan for you, make an appointment for a consultation.

Anti-viral medicines may be useful in a strong case of the flu. These medicines work to inhibit the flu virus from reproducing. These are not over the counter medicines and will require a prescription me or another doctor. These also work best if begun within the first couple of days of a viral infection.

Summary

It is my strong opinion that with proper care and feeding of your immune system, the chances of acquiring any flu this season will be dramatically reduced. In the past several years that I have been testing for and treating vitamin D levels, the incidence of flu amongst my patient population has been radically reduced. My clinical experience has been echoed by other doctors similarly interested in vitamin D levels for their patients. In addition to this one action, as I have outlined, there is much you can do to enhance your immunity this flu season. I hope this has helped to motivate you!