

# HEALTHY LINKS

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Dear Link Sisters,

I am devoting The December Healthy Links Newsletter to the flu. There are many misconceptions that we all have regarding influenza that are important to dispel. I will discuss these myths and explain why they are not true. In addition, physicians and public health experts have been discussing, for a number of years, the possibility of a deadly pandemic flu. This is extremely scary since none of us will have any immunity to the virus. The last major pandemic occurred in 1918 and 50 million people died worldwide. I want each of us to be prepared if a flu pandemic occurs.

Finally, I wish each of you a  
**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year**  
Link Susan



## INFLUENZA

*(Adapted from Washington Post, November 24, 2018 and the NY Times)*

Influenza is a common virus that occurs year round but its occurrence peaks in the winter. For anyone who has developed the flu, they know how miserable they feel from the fever, muscle aches, cough and congestion. Although it is not 100% effective, a yearly flu vaccine is very important for people of all ages.

Unfortunately, there are many people who do not get the flu vaccine. Some people avoid getting the flu vaccine because they don't think it works well enough to be worth it. Some think they are too healthy to need it. And some worry it will make them sick, possibly remembering a time when they got the shot and fell ill soon after they received the vaccine. Please know that this is a persistent myth.

More than 80,000 Americans died of the flu in the winter of 2017-2018, the highest number in over a decade. Last year the flu was caused by H3N2, a particularly virulent strain. Although 90 percent of those deaths were in people over age 65, the flu also killed 180 young children and teenagers, more than in any other year since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began using its current surveillance methods. There were also a record-breaking number of hospitalizations for the flu last year.

I urge you to get vaccinated and please know that it's not too late for this year. The flu often peaks in February so you have enough time to develop immunity. The H1N1 strain is circulating this year, and for now, the vaccine appears to be a good match, says Gregory Poland, director of the Mayo Clinic's Vaccine Research Group in Rochester, Minn. In addition to your doctor, you can get a flu vaccine from you local pharmacy.



## INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

### WHY SHOULD YOU GET THE FLU SHOT?

Below are 5 compelling reasons:

- Adults are as much as five times more likely to die of influenza if they're unvaccinated. Even when people get the flu, new research shows they are better off if they got the flu shot.
- Among patients who develop influenza, those who had been vaccinated were 59% less likely to be admitted to the intensive care unit.
- The flu vaccine appears to also protect people from long-lasting influenza complications, such as heart attacks and strokes, which become more likely during a period of inflammation that can follow an initial infection.
- Pregnant women are less likely to be hospitalized if they get a flu shot, which also offers protection to their newborns, and children are half as likely to die of influenza if they're vaccinated.

### Will the flu shot cause me to develop the flu?

A very common misconception is that the flu shot causes the flu. It has been **proven** that the flu shot does not cause the flu. The vaccine is made with a killed virus so it is literally impossible for it to give you the flu.

### Will the flu shot definitely protect me from this year's flu?

No. Flu vaccine's effectiveness varies quite a bit each year, from a high of 60% in 2010-11 to a low of 19% in 2014-2015. Last season's flu vaccine was about 40% effective at preventing infection. It is impossible to know yet how effective this year's vaccine will be. Experts still urge people to get the flu shot, because while they may be only 40% percent effective at warding off body aches and runny noses, they are [much more effective at preventing influenza's worst outcome](#) — death.

Pan'demik/: pan means "all"; demic (or demographic) means "people." Many experts believe that we are due for an influenza pandemic. When it happens, they tell us, it will probably have a greater impact on humanity than anything else currently happening in the world. When it comes, it will affect every human alive today and it will be highly lethal. Geographical boundaries are meaningless, and it can circle the globe within hours.

Unlike seasonal flu, pandemics occur when a completely new or novel virus emerges. A global flu pandemic begins when a virus circulating in animals — like birds or pigs — mutates to infect humans, allowing it to spread quickly. The Spanish Flu of 1918 caused just such an influenza pandemic and it sickened an estimated one-third of the world's population, killing as many as 50 million people. The virus was so deadly because no one had immunity to the virus. In the United States alone, approximately 675,000 people died in just the eight months between September 1918 and April 1919. Some people died the same day they became ill, and others died within a few days from complications of the flu, such as pneumonia or meningitis.



Although scientists can make a vaccine to fight the pandemic virus, it could take 6 to 7 months before it would be available. The bottom line is that you want to be prepared.

The following are important tips:

- Avoid crowds since the flu strain would be particularly virulent
- Keep a distance of at least three feet from other people
- Stay home if possible since virus transmission rates can fall by nearly 40 percent with mandatory social-distancing measures like closing schools and day cares.
- If you do get sick, isolate yourself and your family inside your home, a practice known among emergency-preparedness experts as “shelter in place.”
- Have at least two weeks of **food, medicine and water** in your home.

During the next pandemic, practice cough etiquette (into a tissue or your inner elbow, not your palm); wash your hands regularly (20 seconds with soap and water); avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. If someone in your home falls ill, minimize close contact. Designate a sick room.

Also, you may want to wear a mask; one of the most effective types for filtering floating flu particles is known as an N95. Consider buying N95 masks before an outbreak. “In a severe pandemic, there will be a global shortage,” says Redd, who served as the C.D.C.’s incident commander during the last flu pandemic, the H1N1 outbreak in 2009.

Producing a vaccine for a new influenza strain could take months; when one becomes available, get it as soon as you can, knowing that it will be distributed first to those most at risk. Beware rumors and fake news. “Misinformation online will be a big challenge,” Redd says. Get to know your neighbors and your community now: You’ll need one another’s help. Don’t let fear erode empathy. In 1918, the sick starved to death, not for lack of food but because people were too afraid to get close enough to feed them. “You can bring a meal to a neighbor who is coughing without having face-to-face contact,” Redd says

## Flu Shots

### [ BY THE NUMBERS ]

**200,000** Average number of people hospitalized with the flu each year in the U.S.

**6**  
MONTHS

Age at which flu shots should begin

**2**  
WEEKS

Time it takes your body to develop antibodies after vaccination

**140-160 MILLION**

Number of doses projected to be available in the U.S. this flu season

**6**  
FEET

Distance someone can spread the flu virus



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention