

Script – Print – Flu Cases on the Rise

H3N2 is the most serious strain this year; still time to get vaccine

After being virtually nonexistent last year, influenza is back in full force.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's most recent flu report there have been at least 4.7 million flu illnesses, 47,000 hospitalizations, and 2,800 deaths from flu this season.

That's a drastic uptick from a year ago when there were just 2,038 flu cases reported from Sept. 27, 2020, to April 24, 2021, according to the CDC.

"Yes, we have been seeing an increase in flu cases which is surprising for us because normally this time of year we see a decrease in cases," says Dr. Martine Schultheis, a family practice physician at OSF HealthCare. "I'm thinking it's because the mask mandates have been lifted and we've seen the COVID-19 mitigation measures have also decreased and more people are relaxed, taking off their masks and not socially distancing as much as during the pandemic."

According to the CDC, the hardest hit parts of the country are in the central and south-central regions. "We're seeing a lot more cases of influenza, especially after spring break, which is usually in March and around Easter," says Dr. Schultheis. "Kids are doing Easter egg hunts, people are traveling, they're seeing family, so it's important to keep their flu vaccination and COVID vaccination up to date as well to decrease the duration of the illness if they were to get infected with flu, and to decrease the risk of hospital admission and to decrease the severity of the symptoms if they become infected."

Influenza A and B viruses cause the most illness in the U.S. especially during flu season. The subtypes of influenza A are H1N1 and H3N2, which has been the most serious strain this year and usually more severe in older people.

"It's very hard to differentiate between the flu, COVID-19 and any other viral infection for that matter," says Dr. Schultheis. "But the most common symptoms of flu are cough, fever, muscle ache, fatigue, sneezing and congestion. Those are common for both cold, flu or any other respiratory illness or virus."

Dr. Schultheis recommends getting enough rest, eat fruits and vegetables, practice good hygiene and she stresses that it's not too late to get the flu vaccine.

"If you feel like your symptoms are getting worse, despite conservative management, such as taking over the counter medication and staying hydrated but you're still not getting better over the course of a week or two weeks, then consult your primary care physician as soon as possible so we can do some testing to figure out what is causing those symptoms," she adds.

For more information on influenza, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).