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Tri-County Health Department Offers Easy Ways to Protect Yourself Against Cold and Influenza Germs

Winter illness season is here, and Tri-County Health Department is offering some common sense ways to protect everyone from catching or spreading the germs that can cause colds and influenza (“the flu”). They also have an interactive statewide list of flu shot clinics on their website, www.tchd.org.

“People can be infectious before they show symptoms or get sick themselves. So in addition to getting a yearly influenza shot, handwashing is a great defense in preventing the spread of many respiratory and stomach illnesses,” according to Richard L. Vogt, MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. “Proper handwashing is effective against giving—or getting—many illnesses, including colds, influenza and infectious diarrhea.”

Whether they are sick or not, people should always wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing diapers; after sneezing and coughing; before and after preparing food; and again before eating. People should use soap and running water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers, which do not require any water, can be used if soap and water are not available.

Refusing to offer a handshake is perfectly acceptable. As long as the person avoiding the handshake explains that they are ill or trying not to spread germs, it becomes a courtesy intended to prevent anyone else from getting sick. Tri-County Health Department urges people to stay home when they are sick.

The influenza virus causes an infection of the nose, throat and lungs. Symptoms tend to appear quickly and include fever over 101 degrees, chills, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches and loss of appetite. Treatment includes rest, drinking plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration, and taking an over-the-counter medicine for pain and fever.

There are anti-influenza medications available that can be prescribed by a physician. These can be especially helpful for the elderly and those who have problems with their immune system. Antibiotics are not effective, because they fight bacteria, and a virus causes these illnesses. Cold

symptoms can be similar to influenza, but symptoms are much milder and usually do not include a high fever or significant fatigue.

While most people will get over a cold, influenza can be much more serious. Some people with influenza—particularly older adults and people with chronic medical problems—can develop pneumonia. The combination of influenza and pneumonia is the seventh leading cause of death among Americans.

For more information on preventing illnesses or finding an influenza shot clinic, visit www.tchd.org.

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