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Stay Flu-Free for the Holidays

December 6-12 is National Hand Washing Awareness Week

By William Fried, MD, Medical Director, Aetna

Welcome to December. Musicians may croon about it being the most wonderful time of the year. But let's face it – it's also flu season. And families across the country will be especially hard hit this year, thanks to a one-two punch from the seasonal flu and the H1N1 (swine) flu virus.

With the holidays upon us, it's more important than ever to take steps to remain flu-free. It's easy to get run down at this time of year – there's a seemingly endless shopping list, cookies to make, parties to attend, homes to decorate and more. While it can be fun, it also can be exhausting. And you may be less likely to take care of yourself.

There *ARE* steps you can take to avoid getting the flu, though. In addition to getting flu shots (or nasal spray flu vaccines) for both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu, follow these tips:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are sick, avoid close contact with others, especially high-risk individuals. Keeping your distance (at least six feet) from others when you are sick can protect them from getting sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, then throw the used tissue away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cover your mouth and nose with your sleeve.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice!) or use an alcohol-based hand wipe or gel sanitizer, especially;
 - after coughing or sneezing
 - before and after preparing food
 - before and after eating
 - after using the toilet
 - after handling animals and animal waste
 - any time your hands are dirty
 - when someone at home is sick
- Teach and remind children to wash their hands.



William Fried, MD

Kids tell it like it is – video offers tips from some “germ experts”



December 6-12 is National Hand Washing Awareness Week. In honor of this observance, check out practical advice on how to stay germ-free from a group with real-life experience -- kids.

Click on one of the links below to see the short video, which features memorable advice:

- On YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8g6OzM7X6mg>
- Or on Aetna's website at <http://media1.aetna.com/wmedia/aet/web/novprevention.wvx>

Q&A with the Doctor

People have so many questions about the flu this year. Below are answers to some of the most commonly asked questions and suggested websites for more information.

Q: What flu vaccines are available and who should get them?

A: There are two types of flu vaccines:

- The seasonal flu shot or nasal spray, which you should get every year
- The new H1N1 flu shot or nasal spray

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises people to get both vaccines this year. For some groups of people, it is even more important. Visit:

<http://www.aetna.com/health-wellness/family-health/facts-about-flu.html>

Q: How can I find out where to get the vaccines? I heard that some people are having a hard time finding the shots.

A: There are several ways to find out where in your area you can access the flu vaccines.

For Seasonal flu vaccine, check with your doctor, or watch for notices in your community, at pharmacies and retail clinics, or from your employer about where you can get yours.

For H1N1 vaccine, check with your doctor and local or state health departments about when and where you can get the H1N1 flu vaccine in your area.

For both Seasonal flu vaccine and H1N1 vaccine availability, check the following:

- Visit Aetna's [DocFind](#) about flu shot clinics (see the "Find a Flu Shot" link of the left side of the page).
- Use the Flu Vaccine Locator on the Department of Health and Human Services' site: <http://www.flu.gov/>. Simply plug your zip code into the box in the middle of the page and nearby flu vaccine providers will come up.

Q: How can I tell if it's H1N1?

A: A federal government website has been established to provide the public with information about the flu and flu prevention. The site offers a handy tool to help you decide if your symptoms are likely due to H1N1 flu.

Visit <http://www.flu.gov/evaluation/>

Q: What should I do if I get sick?

A: This useful website from the CDC tells you what to do to take care of yourself or a family member suffering from the seasonal flu or H1N1 flu. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/sick.htm>

Track the flu

Where in the U.S. are the highest levels of flu? Find out where it's hitting the hardest. Click on the Flu-O-Meter developed by Aetna IntelliHealth and put the cursor over your state:

<http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ih/IH/WSIHW000/29785/8166/205963.html?d=dmSimple>.

Aetna IntelliHealth updates its Flu-o-Meter weekly with information provided by the CDC.



Website of the Month: [Aetna IntelliHealth](#)

Countdown to the New Year: Make resolutions to improve your health in 2010

'Tis the season. It's time to celebrate the holidays with friends and family. It's also a time to step back and think about how you'd like to change your life in the coming year. Consider making healthy New Year's resolutions!



Our website of the month is Aetna IntelliHealth, which offers several features on New Year's resolutions. A Harvard nutritionist offers advice on the best ways to: 1) control your weight 2) exercise and 3) eat healthier foods in the New Year.



- [Three Ways To Watch Your Weight](#)
- [Three Essentials for Working Up a Sweat](#)
- [Three Steps to Better Eating](#)