

Flu vaccine covers only specific strains

It is possible to get the flu even if immunized because of virus mutations

By Sarah Skidmore
Oregon Daily Emerald

It's the time of year to battle the flu and its companions. But getting a flu vaccination will protect you only from certain influenza viruses, not the wide gamut of other upper respiratory diseases and mutated influenza viruses.

"We are seeing a lot of students who come in saying, 'I don't understand. I got the flu shot but I am still sick,'" said Dr. Gerald Fleischli, director of the Student Health Center.

There are dozens of viruses that many people commonly refer to as the flu that are not, said Dr. Charles Lindquist of the health center.

"Most people generalize," he said. "When you get sick you say, 'I must have the flu,' but the truth is the flu is only caused by the influenza virus."

There is a distinct difference in the symptoms of colds vs. the flu.

A cold is commonly characterized by a sore throat, cough, runny nose and possibly a mild fever. The flu begins like a cold but progresses. Symptoms include a high fever (101-103 degrees), watery eyes, headaches, low energy and body aches.

"It is a matter of sick vs. sick," Lindquist said. "A cold can be waited out but the influenza virus is serious. Besides taking one to two weeks to recover, it can have complications."

"There is a certain mortality rate with the flu," Lindquist said.

People with chronic illnesses such as asthma or diabetes and older people are at a higher risk of death, he said. There are also chances of complications such as pneumonia.

The flu shot does not always protect you from the flu either.

"It is a very smart virus," Lindquist said.

The vaccine is only effective for certain strains of the virus and is predetermined and distributed before the onset of the season. Al-

Symptoms of a cold

- Sore throat
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Possible mild fever

Symptoms of the flu

- High fever
- Watery eyes
- Headaches
- Low energy
- Body aches

though the best efforts are taken to determine which strain of the flu will be common, the influenza virus can mutate. This is why it is possible to get the shot and still catch the flu or have the flu one year and not be immune the next, Lindquist said.

Despite the possibility of other illnesses, Fleischli recommends a flu vaccine for protection against what is estimated to be the most common strain of the flu virus for the year.

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