

**Health Notes**

By Audeen Wagner



**Childhood Obesity**

Everywhere you look these days there is another article warning us about this problem which threaten's children's health. It's an epidemic! There is a dramatic increase, in recent years, in heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, asthma, osteoarthritis and sleep disorders in kids. Conditions which are largely thought of as "adult diseases" have now become children's problems, too.

And they are directly linked to obesity.

Many children eat junk food regularly, and have very poor eating habits. The easy availability of sodas, fries, candy and greasy hamburgers contributes to this condition. Lack of exercise is also a factor.

To quote *The Oregonian* recently, "Picture a normal-weight child carrying a 45-pound bag of dog food. Now imagine that child trying to run, play, even just climb stairs." Some experts attribute the increase in the numbers of overweight children to the "three Ns" – Nintendo, Netscape and Nickelodeon!

Some suggestions for families:

- Be a role model. If children see their parents eating right, they will likely follow their lead.
  - Be more active: National recommendation for children is 30 minutes of exercise per day. (That's about how long it takes to walk around Vernonia Lake.)
  - Teach your family healthy eating habits. Read more on the subject and check it out on the internet – there are some good programs and suggestions out there. Try reliable websites such as [www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov) or [www.ific.org](http://www.ific.org).
  - Don't skip breakfast. Kids who eat breakfast are not only less likely to be overweight, they score higher on tests and have better attendance.
  - Set aside time to cook and eat at home. Even with today's busy schedules, it can be done. We all need to sit down to a well-balanced, low-fat, nutritious meal.
  - Don't put your child on a diet. Growing children should never be placed on a restrictive diet, unless overseen by a doctor.
- There are many other helpful guidelines for improving children's health through the foods they eat – check out those websites, and ask your caregiver for other ideas.

**Mammogram schedule:**

Next mammogram visit is November 20, 2002. Call 503-429-9191 for an appointment

**Fairgrounds bazaar space available**

A Christmas Bazaar sponsored by the Friends of the Columbia County Fair will be held Nov. 22-23 in the Pavilion at the fairgrounds. Bazaar hours will be 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Friday and 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Saturday. Set up will be 7-10 a.m. Friday, the 22nd.

Individuals or groups interested in renting space or a table may call Evelyn Hudson at the fairgrounds, 503-397-4231 for a vendor application. Table or space rent is \$15.00.

**Flu complications are very dangerous**

By Kent Burner

The flu has been around us for a long time. While we sometimes call any "bug" that makes us feel poorly "the flu," the ancient Greek physician, Hippocrates, described the symptoms in 412 BC: generally a sudden onset of fever, often with headache, cough, appetite loss, muscle aches and tiredness. Influenza may also be accompanied by stomach ache and diarrhea.

Flu spreads quickly from one person to another. The incubation period is one to two days and a person is infectious for about six days, including the day before onset of symptoms.

The name "flu" comes from the Italian *influenza*, which means "influence," because an epidemic of flu in the early 1500s caused so much sickness that it was believed to come from the "influence of the stars." Now we know that flu is caused by a virus that gets into the upper respiratory tract.

By itself, flu is rarely fatal. But when your body is fighting off the flu virus, other infections or complications, which may be life threatening, can set in. The most common of these is pneumonia, one of the five most common causes of death in elderly persons.

Beside the elderly, flu can be especially serious for people with health problems such as diabetes, kidney disease or congestive heart disease. More than 100,000 Americans are hospitalized with flu each year and about 20,000 die of complications that arise from flu.

Flu costs more than one billion dollars in Medicare expenditures, and more than nine billion dollars in direct health-care costs annually in the United States. Of deaths from influen-

za, 80 to 90 percent occur among individuals 65 years of age and older. Consequently, older persons have the most to gain from vaccination, early detection, and aggressive treatment.

Preventing flu was unthinkable until the 1960s, when veterinarians working at Kimber Farms in Fremont, Calif, developed a strain of pathogen-free chickens and eggs. It became possible to safely culture a vaccine in egg yolk and, by obtaining a sample of the flu virus, use it to make a flu vaccine.

Preventing flu is still hard because the virus changes all the time and in unpredictable ways. The virus that evolves in any given year is slightly different from the virus that spread the previous year.

Each year an international consortium of health specialists monitors the earliest outbreaks of flu to determine which strain of virus is developing. From there, pharmaceutical companies begin the process of manufacturing, testing and getting approval for the current year's vaccine. That's why flu shots are good for only one year.

Sometimes there are complications in the process. Last year the vaccine was very complicated to manufacture; two companies found that their samples were contaminated and had to start the process over, which resulted in a serious shortage of vaccine. This year, there have been no serious problems and there is an ample supply of flu vaccine. Everyone over the age of fifty is strongly encouraged to get a flu

shot. The best time is from mid-September through November but, even if you get it later, it will protect you, as "flu season" extends to the spring.

Flu shots are a powerful lifesaver. According to the National Institute on Aging, flu vaccines can reduce hospitalizations by about 70 percent, and deaths among older people who are not in nursing homes, by about 85 percent. A few people who get flu shots will still get flu, but their cases will be milder.

Medicare covers the cost of flu shots. Private health insurance plans also may pay for the shot. Even if you don't have this coverage, the shots are far less expensive than the cost incurred if you get flu. Over 90 million Americans contract flu every year at a cost of about 70 million lost workdays and \$12 billion in lost production during epidemics.

Ask your doctor about a flu shot. To find out where you can get a flu shot, call the Washington County Department of Health and Human Services at 503-846-8881, the CDC's flu hotline at 1-800-232-2522 (1-800-232-0233 in Spanish), or on the web at <http://www.getaflushot.com>.

Prevention is the best medicine! The bottom line: Protect yourself – get a flu shot each year. It could save your life.

*Kent Burner is Public Information Officer for the Washington County Department of Aging and Veterans' Services. He may be reached by phone at 503-615-4647 or by e-mail at [william.k.burner@state.or.us](mailto:william.k.burner@state.or.us).*

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