

THE H1N1 “SWINE” FLU: prevention, preparation and treatment

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Let's start with the obvious, the flu vaccine. We don't generally recommend it for a number of reasons. There are some highly qualified individuals that believe that there are long term risks of repeated flu shots. This year, in addition, there won't be enough time to adequately test the vaccine. Effectiveness of the flu vaccine program has been spotty to say the least. For the H1N1 swine flu, there won't be enough time to test it. The vaccine industry and the public health establishment both have serious biases in favor of massive vaccination campaigns, and the media go along with their pronouncements. We're skeptical. (Check out LewRockwell.com.) We think it's wiser and safer to be prepared with natural medical approaches rather than relying on the vaccine.

Regarding prevention, let's start with vitamin D, the sunshine vitamin. In the last few years, research has shown that there are vitamin D receptors in many different tissues of the body - brain, intestine, **immune system**, and many others. There is good evidence that an adequate level tends to prevent at least 15 common types of cancer, hypertension, Alzheimer's disease, autoimmune diseases, etc. Here we focus on the immune system. The vitamin is necessary for a component of the innate anti-infection response that is found in all primates studied so far. When a system is conserved over millions of years of evolution, it must be important. There are those researchers that believe that the natural drop in vitamin D levels during the dark seasons is at least part of the reason we have cold and flu epidemics during the winter.

So that means we have to supplement if we want the full benefit of the vitamin D-dependent systems. Those most at risk for severe deficiency are dark-skinned people, and those with malabsorption. What is the proper dose for most of us? Happily, overdose is not much of an issue, but the optimal approach is to get your level tested then to take enough to get your level above 30 and preferably about 50 ng/ml. But the approach that is almost as good for most

people is for an adult to take 4,000 IU per day during the fall, winter and spring. One could easily take it all year long, too, especially if you're like most of us who don't get much sun. For kids, there's not as much data, but babies can easily take 800 IU/day with no danger of overdose. I would just say 1,000/day to make it simple. Kids more than 25 pounds could take 2,000IU/day. The form that is the easiest to take and is cost effective is the liquid drops – 1000 or 2000IU/drop. For further information, check out the Vitamin D Council's website.

Vitamin A is also necessary for proper function of a wide variety of systems; its anti-viral activity is the one we will focus on here. This fact has been well known for years. For instance, it may be the reason that measles infection is much more likely to be fatal in Africa where vitamin A deficiency is common, than here. When African kids with measles are given 50,000 IU of vitamin A, they do much better. So I recommend that everyone take a good supplement containing pre-formed vitamin A and take a high dose twice daily for the first two days of the flu. The recommended amount per dose: for children under 6 months, 10,000 IU; children 6-12 months, 15,000 IU; children 12-24 months, 20,000 IU; children 2-3 years, 25,000-30,000 IU; children 5-7 years; 50,000 IU; children 7-10, 75,000 IU; children 11-14, 100,000 IU; and people 15 and older, 150,000 IU. Liquid vitamin A palmitate is widely available and we carry it in our dispensary.

We routinely prescribe a supplement (Immuno Plus) containing a variety of vitamins, minerals and herbs when we are treating colds, flus, or other infections. Zinc and selenium are specifically helpful. This approach certainly makes sense, so you might want to have a bottle of this on hand. There are other similar products available in health food stores.

Vitamin C is highly recommended. We think the best form is the packets of mineral ascorbates "Emergen-C". An adult can take several per day, and kids – as much as you can get in them. During acute illness, the body can use large amounts of vitamin C so add multi-gram doses of pure vitamin C to the Emergen-C.

You might have read that various health agencies are stocking up on Tamiflu - a synthetic anti-viral drug that works for some flus. It is apparently

relatively ineffective for the H1N1 swine flu that will probably be hitting this winter. Happily, an herbal medicine seems to be more effective and without the troubling side effects of Tamiflu. This is black elderberry. We have found a product containing a concentrated extract of elderberry along with concentrated extracts of Echinacea, Andrographis and ginger root. I believe that this Gaia herb product is available over the counter, but we are also carrying it at our Clinic. We would use two capsules 4 times daily at the first sign of the flu. In addition, if a family member should come down with the flu the rest of the family could take it as a preventive.

I should also mention the homeopathic, Oscilloccinum. It does sometimes work to minimize the severity of the flu. You can take a half-tube as a dose, and follow the directions regarding repetition.

If you want to stock up on any of these from our dispensary, please call ahead to make sure we have them, and if not we will make sure we order enough for you.

It has been observed that hand washing is very important in preventing spread of the flu and also that alcohol based hand sanitizers do kill cold and flu viruses and can be used on the go. It might be useful to keep sanitizing cleaning wipes in the home or office to clean door knobs, light switches and faucet handles and toilet handles and seats. Most grocery stores offer free wipes to use on your shopping cart. Face masks do not actually filter out the viruses (they are so small), but may filter out virus-containing droplets from coughing or sneezing which float in the air. And finally, if you think you might be coming down with the flu, it would be best to stay away from others to reduce the chance of transmission.