Flu Season 2019-2020: Lee Health Shares Three Things You Need to Know to Stay Healthy

(Fort Myers, Fla. – Oct. 21, 2019) --- As the 2019-2020 flu season gears up, it’s time for the Southwest Florida community to get ready. The number of cases in Lee County is already on the rise, so how can we avoid the worst of the flu? It’s as easy as one, two, three, according to Lee Health infection prevention experts.

1. **Get the Flu Shot.** The annual influenza vaccination is, hands down, the most effective way to combat the flu each year, said Dr. Ashraf Khan, Lee Health’s system director for epidemiology.

   “Getting your flu shot can make the difference between a serious medical episode and a safe and worry-free season,” he said. “Everyone able should receive a flu vaccination each year, early in the season. Period. It’s the best way to keep you, your loved ones and your neighbors safe and healthy.”

   The vaccine is available in physician offices, urgent care clinics and at many drug stores and pharmacies. Talk to your health care provider if you have specific questions about the flu shot.

2. **Clean Hands Save Lives.** Another highly effective method to keep the flu at bay is to wash your hands often, according to Khan. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to 5-7 days after becoming sick, he said. This means you could be infected, not know it and unwittingly spread the virus across your home or workplace.

   Good hand hygiene also keeps you from contracting the flu virus. Follow the guide below to help you and those you come into contact with stay healthy:

   **When washing hands with soap and water**
   - Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap.
   - Create a lather and scrub your hands.
   - Wash your hands for 15-20 seconds. This is as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
   - Rinse your hands thoroughly under running water.
   - Dry your hands using a paper towel and use the paper towel to turn off the faucet.
   - If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to clean your hands.

   **When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer**
• Apply the product to the palm of one hand.
• Rub your hands together.
• Rub the hand sanitizer over all the surfaces of your hands and fingers, and continue rubbing until your hands are dry.

3. **Know Where to Go If You’re Sick.** If you come down with the flu and need to seek treatment, make sure you know where to go for the appropriate level of care.
   • **Your doctor’s office.** These physicians know you and your medical needs and should be your first option for flu care.
   
   • **Urgent care centers** provide easy access to skilled physicians and nurses for a wide range of non-emergency injuries or illnesses, like the flu. Many, like [Lee Convenient Care](#), maintain expanded hours to accommodate busy schedules.
   
   • **Telehealth.** Want expert care without leaving home? Use a telehealth service, like [Lee Telehealth](#), to connect with a physician using your smartphone. They can diagnose and prescribe medications for your condition and will even follow up to make sure you’re recovering.
   
   • **The emergency room** should be your last option for the flu, unless you have sudden, severe or concerning symptoms. If you have a life-threatening illness or injury, remember to always call 911 to seek immediate medical attention.

**About the Flu**

Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and can be fatal in some cases. Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear and sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children younger than 5, adults older than 65, pregnant women and people living with chronic medical conditions are at a higher risk for flu-related complications.

**About Lee Health**

*Since the opening of the first hospital in 1916, Lee Health has been a health care leader in Southwest Florida, constantly evolving to meet the needs of the community. A non-profit, integrated health care services organization, Lee Health is committed to the well-being of every individual served, focused on healthy living and maintaining good health. Staffed by caring people, inspiring health, services are conveniently located throughout the community in four acute care hospitals, two specialty hospitals, outpatient centers, walk-in medical centers, primary care and specialty physician practices and other services across the continuum of care. Formerly known as Lee Memorial Health System, the organization began its second century of service with a new name in 2016. Learn more at [www.LeeHealth.org](http://www.LeeHealth.org).*