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HEALTHY CHOICES FOR MIND AND BODY

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INFLUENZA PANIC (10/2005)

Flu season is upon us. People and the government are panicking about a new pandemic of avian flu. The strain, H5N1, apparently closely resembles the virus that caused the 1918 pandemic that killed over 20 million people.

Many people confuse 'flu' with other illnesses and the word 'flu' tends to be a catch-all term. True influenza is a viral illness, with symptoms of very high fever, muscle aches, cough and scratchy throat. It starts very rapidly and feels like being run over by a truck. Only rarely does an influenza victim experience nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. An illness with predominantly stomach/bowel symptoms is not 'flu'. Other respiratory viruses that cause fever circulate during Fall and Winter and may be confused with influenza.

Dangerous, killer strains infect deep in the lungs, with destruction of lung tissue characterized by severe shortness of breath and bloody sputum. Even if the influenza virus itself does not destroy lung tissue, it may set up a person for secondary infection with bacterial pneumonia. About 35,000 people die each year

Once infected, an individual is contagious from two days *prior* to the onset of symptoms until after the fever abates. People who don't even know they are infected yet can pass the disease on to others. This makes 'respiratory etiquette' even more important