

Advice offered on treatment, prevention of flu

Special to The Clinton Courier

Flu season is spiking in Mississippi, and experts at the University of Mississippi Medical Center say people should redouble precautions to avoid being – or creating – the next patient.

The Pediatric Emergency Department has diagnosed more than 120 children daily over the past week with flu or flu-like symptoms, said Dr. Benjamin Dillard, chief of pediatric emergency medicine at Batson Children's Hospital. Total numbers in the Pediatric ED have risen above 200 children daily over the past week.

"Over the past two weeks, we've had an incredible surge in patient volume, well above normal for this time of the year," Dillard said. "All of it is related to influenza and flu-like symptoms."

Numbers for the Adult Emergency Department aren't immediately available, but "we are seeing a big spike in flu cases across all areas," said Dr. Alan Jones, professor and chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine. Parents of young children should be aware of symptoms that mean their child likely needs to be seen by their

health provider or urgent care clinic during regular business hours, or an after-hours clinic or emergency room if their regular provider's office is closed, said Dr. April Palmer, professor of pediatrics and infectious diseases.

They include:

- **Fever of 100.4 degrees or higher** in babies under four weeks old, 102 or higher if between one and three months old, and higher than 102-103 if they are between three months and three years. "A child under the age of a month is the age we most worry about," Palmer said.

- **Dehydration and the inability to hold down fluids.** "A child wearing diapers should have a diaper with urine at least every six hours, and if you notice a baby is not making tears or their soft spot is sinking in, you should worry about dehydration," she said. Older children's urine should be

yellow, not dark or amber, and they should be urinating at least every six hours.

- **Significant difficulty in breathing, including fast breathing.**

"If their lips are blue, they are not getting enough oxygen," Palmer said.

- **Other troubling symptoms or behaviors,** such as babies being inconsolable, babies and children being unresponsive or difficult to wake up, irritability and severe pain.

"And, it might not be the flu," Palmer said. "In the midst of a busy flu season, other diseases and infections creep in. Your child may have something else, or a complication of the flu such as pneumonia. That's why your child should be seen if they're having difficulty breathing."

Adults and the elderly also should be aware of how flu can exacerbate

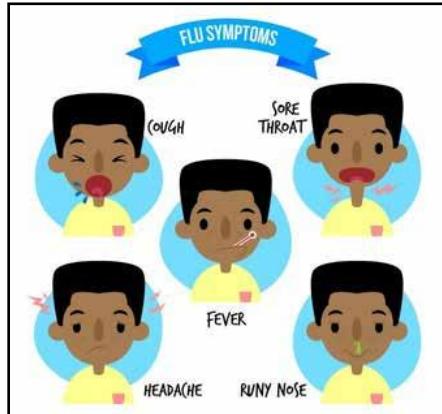
chronic conditions, said Dr. Bhagyashri Navalkele, assistant professor of medicine. Her advice:

Recognize that flu can be worse in adults who already cope with chronic illnesses such as heart and kidney disease, asthma or other breathing disorders.

"Their chronic illnesses can worsen if they get the flu," Navalkele said. "If they have really high fever and cough and flu symptoms, they should see their doctor or go to an emergency room."

The elderly are at significant risk of getting the most severe influenza, she said. "If they are having trouble breathing or having issues like chest pain, that's concerning, because they can easily get pneumonia or other complications that can be related to chronic diseases."

Adults who are otherwise healthy should stay home, rest and drink plenty of fluids. "They should take care not to spread the flu to others. They have that responsibility," Navalkele said.





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