

Tips offered on reducing flu

People die from the flu unnecessarily, said Mike Bradshaw, Kansas State University Research and Extension health and safety specialist.

“The United States Department of Health cites the Influenza virus, commonly called “the flu,” as the sixth leading cause of death in the U.S., and reports that it kills 20,000 to 40,000 Americans each year,” Bradshaw said.

“The virus is highly contagious and spreads through inhalation of droplets containing respiratory secretions when persons who have the flu cough or sneeze,” he said. “The virus also can be spread by personal contact, either by shaking hands or touching a doorknob or other surface that someone who has the flu has just touched.”

He gave these suggestions as ways to avoid catching the flu:

- Ask your health care professional about getting a flu shot. The shots typically boost immunity to the illness 70 to 90 percent and are generally most effective when given two to three weeks before flu season, which typically lasts from December to March.

If you miss the recommended timeframe, however, getting a shot at a later date may still offer increased immunity. The shots must be administered annually, as flu viruses regularly mutate.

- Strive for a healthy lifestyle — eat a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables, drink plenty of fluids, including water, and get adequate rest.

- Wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your nose, eyes and mouth and introducing germs to exposed mucous membranes.

- Try to avoid those whom you know are ill during the flu season. For example, do grocery shopping early or late or on a weekday, when stores are less crowded. If you’re sitting in a theatre and someone in the row behind you starts coughing, move to another seat.

The Department of Health reports that adults who have the flu typically are contagious for five to seven days from the onset of the fever.

Children may be contagious for seven to 10 days or longer, especially to those who may have an immune system that is compromised by a chronic illness such as

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza, also known as bird flu, is a viral respiratory infection in birds.

Scientists are studying the illness that currently is infecting small flocks of birds in Southeast Asia and, while the illness has not yet been reported in birds or humans in the United States, there is concern: The strain of influenza infecting birds in Asia is a more severe form of bird flu than viruses reported previously, said Scott Beyer, Kansas State University Research and Extension poultry science specialist.

Most forms of viruses that infect poultry do not infect humans.

Since this is, however, a more severe strain of the virus, scientists are watching it closely, Beyer said.

“So far, the 116 people who have been diagnosed with the disease have been people who are working directly with infected flocks,” he said.

“Research on the 2005 bird flu is ongoing and keeping up with the news is advisable.”

There’s no reason to pass up chicken or turkey on the menu, though.

Heat from normal cooking would destroy the virus, if present, Beyer said.

asthma, diabetes or chemotherapy.

Certain environments may increase risk as well. Examples would be children in day-care or older adults living in a nursing home.

The incubation period for the flu is one to four days. One reason why the illness can spread through a school, workplace or community quickly, Bradshaw said.

Common symptoms of the flu include: headaches, muscle aches, joint pain; fatigue; sore throat; a dry, hacking cough that progresses to a wet cough, producing mucous; fever, with or without chills; nasal congestion, watery eyes, runny nose; and vomiting and diarrhea (which is more common in children under 6).

The flu is a viral illness that may

subside with adequate rest, increasing fluid intake and targeting symptoms, such as taking cold medicine for a runny nose, Bradshaw said.

“While smokers can have a greater risk of bronchitis and pneumonia as complications from the flu, others, including small children with immune systems not fully developed and the elderly, whose immune systems may be compromised by age or chronic illness, face an increased risk,” he said.

For information about the flu, check with your health care professional or the Thomas County Health Department, 460-4596.

Information about personal health and safety is available on the K-State Research and Extension Web site: www.oznet.ksu.edu

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Nose to nose



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Sir Dutch Trustworthy (left) and Robin, an albino Pekinese, visited the Free Press newspaper office earlier this week. The two animals were apprehensive, but fortunately no fur flew. The bunny belongs to Richard and Lana Westfahl and the Pekinese owners are Dennis and Jeanette Applegate, both of Colby.

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