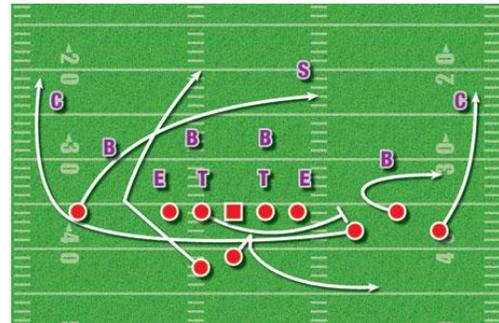




Blocking the Flu as You Watch the Big Football Game

By Ralph Morris, MD, MPH

Are you ready for the big football game? Are you ready for the flu virus if it shows up at your big game party? This Sunday, as New England clashes with Seattle, your body may be up against its own formidable opponent—one that's too small to be seen but packs a wallop.



Here are my “X’s and O’s” for blocking the flu on Sunday:

Sick? Stay Home: *If you feel sick, enjoy the game alone. Your friends will thank you and you can tune in to the plays in your pajamas!*

Get a Flu Shot: *The annual seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for everyone six months old and older. You may have heard that this year’s flu vaccine is only 23% effective, but not getting the vaccine takes that down to zero. Getting a flu shot will prevent thousands of hospitalizations. The vaccine starts working about two weeks after you get it, so if you haven’t gotten it yet, it is not too late to help you ward off flu in the coming weeks.*

Get Plenty of Rest, Exercise and Eat Right: *A healthy lifestyle can help you avoid getting the flu. Rest, exercise and a healthy diet promote a strong immune system.*

Wash Your Hands Frequently: *Flu viruses and many other pathogens thrive by a “hand-to-mouth” or “hand-to-nose” or “hand-to-eye” existence. Wash your hands frequently and keep your hands away from your face to avoid enabling this form of “germ transportation.”*

Update Your Cough Etiquette: *Coughing into your hand and then shaking hands with the folks who have just been introduced to you is not cool. Kids everywhere are learning a great alternative: Cough into your elbow.*

Use Fresh Plates for Each Pass at the Buffet Table: *Let’s say Dave, who has the flu, goes through the buffet line for seconds with his original plate. He picks up a chicken wing using the*

...serving tongs and transfers the wing to his plate, tapping the serving tongs on his plate to help release the wing. Angela, next in line, picks up the tongs and serves herself some wings and some virus particles, courtesy of the contaminated tongs. Dave contaminated the tongs by tapping them on his germy plate; he also contaminated the tong handles with his hands. Thanks, Dave! Next time, get a fresh plate (and don't go to parties when you are sick).

Keep Track of Your Beverage: *Many glasses and beverage bottles at a party look the same, so develop a plan to keep track of yours.*

Post-game Cleanup: *A word to hosts and hostesses: If possible, wash all reusable cutlery, dishes and serving ware in your dishwasher or use disposable plates and cutlery. Dishwashers should reach a final rinse temperature of at least 150 degrees Fahrenheit or employ a sanitizing cycle. No dishwasher? Wash and rinse dishes as you normally would using hot water. In a separate basin, add 1 teaspoon of unscented regular strength¹ household bleach (5.25%) for each gallon of warm water. [Rule of Thumb: The typical basin holds about 4 gallons of water, so add 4 teaspoons of bleach to a filled basin.] Soak the rinsed dishes in the water for at least one minute; let dishes air dry completely.*

Sanitize the powder room used by guests: Clean surfaces first with detergent and water and then sanitize using 1/2 tablespoon of regular strength household² bleach (5.25%) in 2 quarts of water. Replace hand towels or provide disposable hand towels.

Preventing the flu is no deflation!

Ralph Morris, MD, MPH, is a Physician and Preventive Medicine and Public Health official living in Bemidji, MN.

¹ Use 2/3 teaspoon of concentrated bleach (8.25%).

² Use 1 teaspoon of concentrated bleach (8.25%).