Vaccines and Vigilance: How to stay healthy this season

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Most of us at Riderwood are vaccinated now for the seasonal flu and COVID-19. According to the National Institute of Health's National Institute of Aging, vaccination is the most effective way to prevent the flu or COVID-19. If vaccinated and then exposed to the virus, we can still become ill, but vaccination can prevent us from getting seriously ill if we get the flu or COVID-19.

Flu Virus: Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets in the air when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. Fluid droplets can travel 6 feet and stay in the air for several minutes to hours. Less commonly, the flu can spread from surfaces. You can become infected when you touch the surface and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Cold and flu viruses live longer in colder, drier environments. Usually, people with the flu can spread it a day before and up to a week after they start to feel sick.

Our immune systems weaken with age. People with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, heart disease, or who have had a stroke are more at risk for flu and its complications. One serious complication is pneumonia.

COVID-19: SARS-CoV-2 viruses that cause COVID-19 are often spread in smaller fluid droplets called aerosols that can travel more than six feet and stay suspended in the air longer than flu droplets. Vaccination is also the best tool to prevent long COVID, chronic symptoms that last three months or longer.

Ten tips to help protect yourself and others from respiratory illnesses

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the following ways to help stop the spread of all respiratory viruses, including colds, seasonal flu, and COVID-19.

1. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before you eat.

2. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer when you return to your apartment (This is very important if you use handrails and/or door knobs in public hallways and stairwells).

3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth unless your hands are clean.

4. Avoid close contact with those who are sick.

5. Stay home when you are sick. Order carry-out meals.

6. Contact your health care provider if you feel sick. You may be tested to help determine which medications might be helpful and to determine if there are quarantine protocols for you to follow.

7. Return to your normal activities when your symptoms are better AND you have not had a fever for 24 hours (and are not on a fever-reducing medication). This process lowers your chance of infecting others.

8. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of tissues in a lined trash can.

9. Routinely clean surfaces and frequently touched objects, such as doorknobs, faucets, phones, and keyboards with a disinfectant cleaner.

10. Wear a mask to protect yourself and others, which is also helpful when in large groups, especially if you have chronic health conditions.