News Release

Darlene Hopkins

CEA-FCH Haskell County

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service

November 26, 2018

**Tips for Facing the Cold and Flu Season**

**Andrew B. Crocker, Gerontology Health Specialist-Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service**

Texans are always grateful for the cooler weather that comes during the winter months. However, with this welcome weather comes the dreaded cold and flu season. Each year, 10-20 percent of Americans will contract the influenza virus, better known as “the flu.” The common cold takes an even greater toll on people – affecting around 25 percent of the population annually. While there are no proven methods to prevent these maladies, there are some simple precautions that may help reduce your risk of feeling under the weather.

**Wash Your Hands**: Most cold and flu germs are spread by direct contact. If you were to sneeze into your hand and then touch a doorknob, the germs may stay on that doorknob for hours – even days. LaShanda Williams says that she washes her hands frequently at work because she shares many public spaces with co-workers. “So many people in my office are sick or have sick children and may or may not wash their hands during the day,” said Williams. “I figure that if I keep my hands clean, I can reduce my risk of being sick.” LaShanda is doing the right thing to protect herself from the germs of others. She is also reducing the risk of spreading any germs she may carry to her co-workers. So wash your hands often – you will be taking a big step toward preventing illness.

**Sneezes and Coughs**: Many people have the initial reaction to cover their nose or mouth with their hands when they sneeze or cough. A better practice would be to cover the nose and mouth with a tissue or handkerchief. Germs cling to your bare hands – muffling coughs and sneezes with your hands results in passing along your germs to others. If you don't have a tissue, turn your head away from people near you and cough into the air. If you do cover a sneeze or cough with your hands, remember to wash your hands immediately.

**Drink Plenty of Fluids**: Your body cannot function properly without fluids – especially water. Water flushes your system, washing out the poisons as it rehydrates you. In addition to water, natural fruit juices give you the hydration that your body needs in addition to vitamins and minerals that may be lacking. On average, an adult needs around 8-eight ounce glasses of water each day. Dehydration is a common occurrence with any illness so remember to keep your fluid intake up.

**Relax and Be Happy**: Stress may have a very negative effect on your health. Recent studies have shown that people with a positive attitude – energetic, happy and relaxed – are less likely to catch colds than people who are depressed, nervous or angry. People with a positive attitude may show fewer signs and symptoms of illness because healthy attitudes tend to promote healthy lifestyle habits.

**Sleep**: Remember that sleep plays a very important role in your body’s ability to heal itself. Linda Bice says that a good night’s rest is often all she needs when she starts feeling ill. Says Bice, “I usually don’t get sick and when I do, I know it’s because I haven’t been getting enough rest. So, I start drinking more fluids and try to get as much rest as possible.” Sleep is very important for so many of the functions of the body but especially in the role of illness prevention.

**Vaccinate**: Though there is really nothing to be done about the common cold, a vaccine for the flu is available each year. Studies have shown that the flu shot reduces the number of people who contract pneumonia as a result of the flu, upper respiratory infections, missed days at work and visits to a doctor for respiratory infections. Even if a flu shot does not prevent the flu, the vaccine can reduce the severity of flu symptoms and decrease the risk of complications. In addition, the flu shot is now covered by most health insurance plans. Ask your healthcare provider about whether or not you should have the flu shot this year.

Since there are no known cures for colds and flu, prevention must be your goal. The winter months that bring the Lone Star State its cooler weather do not necessarily have to bring colds and flu to you and your family. For more information about this topic, please contact your healthcare provider or your County Extension Agent.

For more information on family and consumer science related topics go to [www.haskell.agrilife.org](http://www.haskell.agrilife.org) or like us on Facebook at: Haskell County 4-H and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Also, contact Darlene Hopkins- the Haskell County Extension Agent for Family and Community Health at 101 S. Ave D, Haskell, Texas- phone # 940-864-2658.

*Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regards to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating*