Flu season is on the way; be prepared

By Vincent Civitillo
Features Editor

With November just around the corner, students and faculty alike can begin to prepare for the coming of Rider basketball, Thanksgiving feasts, cold weather and, unfortunately, the beginning of the dreaded flu season.

At first glance, one might underestimate influenza, especially when compared to other diseases such as the West Nile Virus, which may have been on campus earlier this semester.

However, the flu is actually a far bigger problem said director of Student Health Services Valerie Kamin.

“Last year we had 114,000 hospitalizations a year from the flu and 20,000 deaths, but how many people die from West Nile, 90?” she said. “You have a greater chance of winning the lottery than you do of getting the West Nile Virus. But why is it only lasts one season and that’s why year after year we have to keep re-inoculating people because sometime around March or April you lose your immunity to the flu.”

For students living in “a communal environment like a residence hall,” the risks of catching influenza are high, but the consequences can be higher, as according to Kamin, the virus can take a student out of class for up to five days.

“It’s a smart idea to get the shot because the virus is spread by sneezing, coughing or by touch, and the symptoms hit hard with high fever, coughing, muscle aches, chills, headache, sore throat and fatigue,” she said.

“Regular exercise and keeping a strong immune system are just two of the ways to combat the flu and keep a person healthy,” said Kamin.

“People should also get a good amount of sleep and keep it consistent from day to day, at the same time of day,” she said. “Eating good food is really important in keeping the body strong, multi-vitamins like Centrum Silver help because they have a lot of anti-oxidants.”

“Another way to easily contract it is to touch your face with your hands,” Kamin added. “If someone has it and they touch a doorknob and then I touch it and touch my eyes, then that’s a really good way to get it because eyes are really susceptible to disease.”

The shot will be administered in the Student Health Center for a fee of $10, which can be paid in person or billed to a student’s account.

Anyone who has shown a serious allergic reaction to eggs or a previous flu shot, as well as those who have a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), should consult their physician before inoculation.

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According to Kamin, in preparation for the upcoming season, which will start soon and peak around February, the Health Center has stocked-up on this season’s vaccine, which consists of three strains of the virus that the Center of Disease Control (CDC) has predicted to have the greatest impact this year.

“The CDC is usually pretty on target with predicting which strains will hit hardest,” Kamin said. “Even if you’re exposed to a different strain than what you’ve been vaccinated for, you can still get the flu, but the shot should help to lessen its impact.

“A lot of times people don’t want to get the shot because they have misconceptions; they think that if they take the shot they can get sick. You cannot get sick from the shot because you’re not being inoculated with live virus, you’re being inoculated with dead virus. That’s why it only lasts one season and that’s why year after year we have to keep re-inoculating people because sometime around March or April you lose your immunity to the flu.”

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