Flu season runs from October 2014 through May 2015. The best way to avoid catching the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

Here’s what you need to know. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. For the 2014-2015 flu season, the flu vaccine provides protection against three viruses: A (H1N1), A (H3N2), and B. While there are many different flu viruses, the seasonal flu vaccine is designed to protect against the top three or four flu viruses that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season. People should begin getting vaccinated soon after flu vaccine becomes available, ideally by October, to ensure that as many people as possible are protected before flu season begins. Flu vaccines are designed to protect against flu viruses that experts predict will be the most common during the upcoming season. Three kinds of flu viruses commonly circulate among people today: influenza A (H1N1) viruses, influenza A (H3N2) viruses, and influenza B viruses. Each year, one or two flu viruses of each kind are used to produce the seasonal influenza vaccine. Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or possibly their nose.

Give Your Sneeze the Sleeve! If you don’t have a tissue to cover your mouth and nose, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.

Period of contagiousness? You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

How serious is the flu? Certain people are at greater risk for serious complications if they get the flu. This includes older people, young children, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), and persons who live in facilities like nursing homes.

Flu seasons are unpredictable and can be severe. Over a period of 30 years, between 1976 and 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths in the United States range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people.

Preventing seasonal flu: Get vaccinated The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season.
Every Kiss Begins With 80 Million Germs

A kiss isn’t just a kiss: It’s also an opportunity to transfer millions of germs. That’s the word from new Dutch research that suggests 10 seconds of lip lock can translate into 80 million germs moving from one person to the other. And two people who smooch a bunch of times each day will end up sharing similar germs.

"Intimate kissing, involving full tongue contact and saliva exchange, appears to be a courtship behavior unique to humans and is common in over 90 percent of known cultures," study author Remco Kort, an adviser to the Microbia Museum of Microbes in Amsterdam, added, "To our knowledge, the exact effects of intimate kissing on the oral microbiota [microscopic living organisms] have never been studied. We wanted to find out the extent to which partners share their oral microbiota, and it turns out, the more a couple kiss, the more similar they are."

In one experiment, the researchers gave 21 couples a probiotic drink containing bacteria before they kissed. Swab samples afterwards showed the transfer of those 80 million germs.

The researchers also found that tongue germs were more similar among couples compared to people who don’t know each other. But in the big picture, according to the news release, mouth germs play only a small part: The mouth is home to more than 700 types of bacteria, but the body houses more than 100 trillion microorganisms, which help with tasks like fighting disease and digesting food.

Chronic Marijuana Use and The Brain

Long-term marijuana use may lead to changes in brain function and structure, according to a new study. Researchers recruited 48 adult marijuana users who consumed the drug, on average, three times per day. They also included 62 non-users matched for age and gender. All of the participants underwent a series of MRI scans. Multiple MRI techniques were used to evaluate different brain characteristics. The results? Chronic marijuana users had smaller brain volume in the orbitofrontal cortex, an area of the brain associated with addiction. But, they also had increased brain connectivity. The earlier a person started using marijuana on a regular basis, the greater the structural and functional connectivity.

According to the authors, the study shows that chronic marijuana use “initiates a complex process that allows neurons to adapt and compensate for smaller gray matter volume.” They say further study is needed to see whether these changes revert back to normal with discontinued use of the drug and whether similar effects happen in occasional users.
Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help

Alcohol-related problems — which result from drinking too much, too fast, or too often — are among the most significant public health issues in the United States. Many people struggle with controlling their drinking at some time in their lives. Approximately 17 million adults ages 18 and older have an alcohol use disorder (AUD) and 1 in 10 children live in a home with a parent who has a drinking problem.

Does Treatment Work?
The good news is that no matter how severe the problem may seem, most people with an alcohol use disorder can benefit from some form of treatment. Research shows that about one-third of people who are treated for alcohol problems have no further symptoms 1 year later. Many others substantially reduce their drinking and report fewer alcohol-related problems.

Signs of an Alcohol Problem:
Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a medical condition that doctors diagnose when a patient’s drinking causes distress or harm. The condition can range from mild to severe and is diagnosed when a patient answers “yes” to two or more of the following questions:

In the past year, have you:
- Had times when you ended up drinking more, or longer than you intended?
- More than once wanted to cut down or stop drinking, or tried to, but couldn’t?
- Spent a lot of time drinking? Or being sick or getting over the aftereffects?
- Experienced craving — a strong need, or urge, to drink?
- Found that drinking — or being sick from drinking — often interfered with taking care of your home or family? Or caused job troubles? Or school problems?
- Continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?
- Given up or cut back on activities that were important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, in order to drink?
- More than once gotten into situations while or after drinking that increased your chances of getting hurt (such as driving, swimming, using machinery, walking in a dangerous area, or having unsafe sex)?
- Continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having had a memory blackout?
- Had to drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want? Or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect than before?
- Found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, irritability, anxiety, depression, restlessness, nausea, or sweating? Or sensed things that were not there?

If you have any of these symptoms, your drinking may already be a cause for concern. The more symptoms you have, the more urgent the need for change. A health professional can conduct a formal assessment of your symptoms to see if an alcohol use disorder is present. For an online assessment of your drinking pattern, go to RethinkingDrinking.niaaa.nih.gov.

Massage Therapy
Dec. 2nd
Mellon Lounge
11am-3pm
Need release from Stress?
Knead release from stress!
"Bionic Man" Showcases Medical Research

The National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB) recently launched the "Bionic Man" an interactive web tool showcasing the latest research advances in biotechnology. It features fourteen technologies being developed by NIBIB-supported researchers. Examples include a powered prosthetic leg that helps users achieve a more natural gait, a wireless brain-computer interface that lets people with paralyzed legs and arms control computer devices or robotic limbs using only their thoughts, and a micro-patch that delivers vaccines painlessly and doesn't need refrigeration.