What sort of flu season is expected this year?

It’s not possible to predict what this flu season will be like. Flu seasons are unpredictable in a number of ways. While flu spreads every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season usually varies from one season to another.

Will new flu viruses circulate this season?

Flu viruses are constantly changing so it’s not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year. For more information about how flu viruses change, visit How the Flu Virus Can Change.

When will flu activity begin and when will it peak?

The timing of flu is very unpredictable and can vary from season to season. Flu activity most commonly peaks in the U.S. between December and February. However, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May.

What should I do to prepare for this flu season?

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. While there are many different flu viruses, the seasonal flu vaccine is designed to protect against the main flu viruses that research suggests will cause the most illness during the upcoming 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. In addition to getting vaccinated, you can take everyday preventive actions like staying away from sick people and washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs.

If you are sick with flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading flu to others.

When should I get vaccinated?

CDC recommends that people get vaccinated against flu soon after vaccine becomes available, preferably by October.

It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu.

How should you wash your hands?

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.
Stress Might Be Even More Unhealthy for the Obese

FRIDAY, Sept. 26, 2014 (HealthDay News) -- Recurring emotional stress may trigger a stronger biochemical response in overweight people, possibly increasing their risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes, a new study suggests.

Researchers found that overweight people repeatedly placed in a stressful situation exhibited increasing amounts of interleukin-6, a protein that promotes inflammation in the body, in their saliva. Normal weight people did not exhibit this escalation in interleukin-6 levels when exposed to repeated stress.

The inflammation caused by interleukin-6 has been associated with a number of conditions for which obesity itself creates an increased risk, including hardening of the arteries, type 2 diabetes, cancer and fatty liver disease, the researchers said.

On two consecutive days, researchers placed people of various body sizes in stressful situations, including a very unfriendly job interview and a difficult oral math exercise, McInnis said.

They then took saliva samples to see how the stress affected the person’s body chemistry. Lean people started out with lower interleukin-6 levels than obese people, but both lean and obese participants exhibited similar amounts of biochemical response to stress on the first day, the investigators found.

However, overweight or obese individuals exhibited an interleukin-6 response on the second day nearly double that of their response the day before. By comparison, the second-day response of lean people was the same as it was their first day.

This indicates that obese people are physically affected by repeated stress much more dramatically than people at normal weight, and recover from stress more slowly, McInnis said.

Further, the relation-

"When we brought all these folks back in for the second day, we found the greater the body fat someone had, the larger the interleukin-6 response they had," she said. "It seems that every percentage point of body fat makes you more susceptible to inflammation."

The findings "suggest a possible explanation for the increased risk of illness and disease in overweight and obese individuals," said Christopher Ochner, an obesity and nutrition expert at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, who was not involved with the study. "There are almost certainly many pieces to that puzzle, but this may indeed be an important one."

The findings were published online recently in the journal Brain, Behavior and Immunity.
About 100 People Being Monitored for Ebola in Texas

THURSDAY, Oct. 2, 2014 (HealthDay News) -- Health officials in Texas said Thursday that approximately 100 people who came into contact with Ebola patient Thomas Eric Duncan are now being monitored for symptoms of the often fatal disease.

The updated count came after an announcement Wednesday that Dallas County health officials were monitoring a potential second Ebola patient who had close contact with Duncan, the first person to be diagnosed with Ebola in the United States, according to news reports.

Zachary Thompson, director of Dallas County Health and Human Services, stated "Let me be real frank to the Dallas County residents: The fact that we have one confirmed case, there may be another case that is a close associate with this particular patient," Thompson said. "So this is real. There should be a concern, but it's contained to the specific family members and close friends at this moment."

Besides Duncan’s family members, the people under observation include five schoolchildren as well as the three-member ambulance crew that transported Duncan on Sunday to Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital. He remains in serious condition at the hospital, officials said Thursday.

Duncan may have had contact with the five children at a home in Texas over the weekend. The children attend four different schools, including a high school, a middle school and two elementary schools. The schools will remain open but will undergo a thorough cleaning as a precaution, The New York Times reported.

"If anyone develops fever, we'll immediately isolate them to stop the chain of transmission," Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told the AP.

People who had contact with Duncan will be monitored for fever during the next 21 days, which is the maximum incubation period for Ebola, Frieden said.

Duncan flew to the United States from Liberia after quitting his job with a shipping company in Monrovia, Liberia, first developed Ebola symptoms Sept. 24 and sought care two days later at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital, but was released from the hospital. Some hospital officials weren’t aware at the time that he had been in West Africa, the AP reported.

He was taken back to the hospital Sunday after his condition worsened.

Frieden stressed that Ebola is not easily transmitted -- to become infected a person must come into direct contact with the bodily fluids of a person who is suffering symptoms. Those symptoms include fever, muscle pain, vomiting and bleeding and can appear as long as 21 days after exposure to the virus.

The Duncan case in Dallas is the sixth to be treated in the United States since the Ebola outbreak began in West Africa last spring. An unidentified American doctor who had been working in Sierra Leone is currently being cared for at a hospital at the U.S. National Institutes of Health in Washington, D.C.

Three others -- who became infected with the virus have recovered, while a fourth continues to undergo treatment at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta.

The Ebola epidemic in West Africa is the worst outbreak ever of the disease. So far, an estimated 6,500 people have become infected and nearly 3,100 have died in the countries of Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, according to the World Health Organization. The epidemic could strike as many as 1.4 million people by mid-January unless the global community mounts a rapid response to the crisis, according to estimates by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
The fall season can be a very busy time of year. Starting college, fall sports, and new friends can be a huge distraction when it comes to obtaining proper nutrition. However, good nutrition balanced with moderate amounts of exercise is the cornerstone to good grades, high levels of alertness, and physical energy to participate in the things that we enjoy. Many of you may be asking, what is proper nutrition and how to I achieve this goal? The information below will assist you in achieving good nutrition and overall wellness.

**Vegetables:**
Consume 2½ cups per day. Eat more red, orange, and dark green veggies like tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli in main dishes. Fresh frozen and canned vegetables count.

What counts as a cup:
1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice; 2 cups of leafy salad greens.

**Fruits:**
Consumes 2 cups per day. Use fruits as snacks, salads, and desserts. At breakfast top your cereal with bananas or strawberries; add blueberries to pancakes.

What counts as a cup:
1 cup of raw or cooked fruit or 100% fruit juice, ½ cup dried fruit.

**Grains:**
6 ounces per day. Substitute whole grain choices for refined-grain breads, bagels, rolls, breakfast cereal, crackers, rice, and pasta.

What counts as an ounce:
1 slice of bread, ½ cup cooked rice, cereal, or pasta; 1 ounce of ready to eat cereal.

**Dairy:**
3 cups per day. Choose skim (fat free) or 1% (low fat) milk. They have the same amount of calcium, protein, and carbohydrates as whole milk but with less fat and calories.

What counts as a cup:
1 cup of milk, yogurt, or fortified soymilk; 1 ½ ounces of natural or 2 ounces of processed cheese.

**Protein:**
5 ½ ounces per day. Eat a variety of foods from the protein food group each week, such as seafood, beans, and nuts as well as lean meats, poultry, and eggs.

What counts as an ounce:
1 ounce of lean meat; poultry or fish; 1 egg; 1 Tbsp peanut butter; ½ ounce of nuts or seeds; ¼ cup of beans.

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**NUTRITION CORNER!**

Information brought to you by:
American Cancer Society
CDC, NIH, Mayo Clinic
U.S. Food and Drug Administration