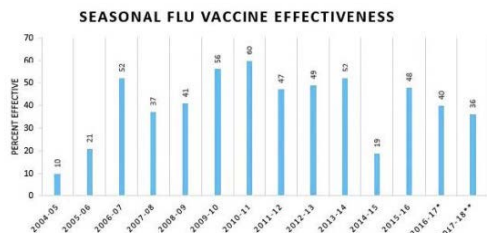


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Local urgent care besieged by flu cases

By John T. Miller



This graph from the CDC represents the effectiveness of seasonal flu vaccines from the 2004-05 season through 2016-17. The numbers presented for the 2015-16 season were CDC estimates from Nov. 2, 2015 through April 15, 2016, while the numbers presented for the 2016-17 season are from a draft of a manuscript in progress. Interim early estimates for 2017-18 may differ from final end-of-season estimates. Image provided

Samaniego also cites studies finding that symptoms are far less severe for people who have the flu shot and yet still contract the disease.

The weather contributes to the spread of the virus, which explains why the flu season corresponds to winter. "When it is cold or wet, people tend to gather inside and huddle in the same rooms, increasing the chances to spread the germs," said Samaniego. "Once the weather warms up and people can go outside, the chance for it to spread is reduced."

Another factor causing the rapid transmission of the flu is the incubation period. After coming in contact with the virus, it may be at least 24 hours before symptoms begin to show. Even though unaware of the infection, a person is already contagious to others.

After the incubation period, flu symptoms may appear as a fever, or feverish chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though that is more common in children.

Asked when someone should go to the doctor, Samaniego replied, "You should come in as soon as you have classic muscle aches and fever chills. Treating the sickness with Tamiflu [a prescription medicine], will help suppress the symptoms and speed up recovery."

The flu can often progress to something more serious, especially if there are any predisposing conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD, sometimes called emphysema), heart conditions, or in the very young or elderly, according to Samaniego. "We're seeing a lot of pneumonia, plus other types of infections, especially in the sinus and ear areas." In the young and healthy, the flu symptoms will typically last between a few days and a couple of weeks.

The CDC warns of other, more serious complications on its website, further indicating a need for a hospital visit and a doctor's care.

Samaniego graduated from the Harvard School of Medicine and settled in Lafayette to practice emergency medicine 25 years ago. He received his HealthCare Executive MBA and launched his own small business, Stat Med Urgent Care, first in Lafayette four years ago and now in Pleasant Hill and Livermore.

"I started Stat Med Urgent Care with ER doctors to provide greater care outside of a crowded ER at an affordable price," says Samaniego.

He is also active in the community, having volunteered as a team physician for Campolindo High School, where his three sons went to school, and as a premed advisor at Saint Mary's College, as well as team

In this particularly drastic flu season, even the staff at a local urgent care center isn't immune to the inconvenience. When another doctor at Stat Med called in sick via text message at 3 a.m. on a Saturday, Dr. Armando Samaniego had to scramble for coverage at his three sites.

Samaniego, a Lafayette resident and founder of Stat Med in Lafayette, says, "The incidence and prevalence of the flu has been much, much higher this year. We are seeing at least three to six positive readings at each of our clinics every day for the flu."

He cites two main reasons for the increase in cases: "This particular flu is much more aggressive, and the vaccine may not be as responsive as last year's."

Even though the vaccine does not totally ensure that you won't catch the flu (see graph), a 2013 study published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* found that people who got the flu shot were less likely to be hospitalized. Effectiveness is also dependent on age, with a 2013 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finding that people over 65 who got the vaccine were just as likely to visit the hospital for flu symptoms as those who did not get the vaccine.

doctor for the Gaels rugby team.

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