

Health Officials Bracing for Expected Epidemic of Influenza

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There is a better than even chance that an influenza epidemic will occur in sections of this country during the coming winter season, according to officials of the U.S. Public Health Service. Immunization against the disease within the next couple of months is therefore advised, particularly in the case of those persons who are susceptible to the hazards of influenza than is the general population.

An upsurge of the infection is also anticipated in Los An-

geles County either late this year or early in 1962. Though considerably more than the usual number of cases were noted during the winter months of 1959-60, influenza has been relatively quiescent in this area for the past few years.

EXPERIENCE has shown that epidemics of influenza generally occur in most communities in one-to-four-year cycles. At long intervals of 30 years or so, the epidemic becomes worldwide (pandemic) and passes swiftly from coun-

try to country as it did in the Asian flu epidemic of 1957-58, which was one of the worst flu outbreaks since World War I. An attack of influenza has much the same effect on the body as a vaccination against the disease; that is, the individual is left with a resistance or immunity to the infection. However, in the case of influenza, it is an immunity that lasts only a few years at best, and therefore many persons who had the disease in 1957 or later are once again susceptible to influenza infection.

WHILE THERE IS A vaccine available that affords a reasonable degree of protection against all known influenza virus, the immunity it confers is unlikely to last more than a year. Notwithstanding, all persons to whom influenza constitutes a special danger should be inoculated against it.

Influenza vaccine does not confer immunity against the disease until a week or two after it is administered, so it should be taken well in advance of the influenza season. Even when not wholly successful in preventing the disease, the vaccine tends to lessen the

severity of the attack. However, vaccination against influenza after exposure to the infectious agent or the dissemination of the virus in a community is practically useless—so vulnerable are people to the organization and so rapid is its spread.

INDIVIDUALS who should be protected against influenza are the chronically ill—including those persons with certain lung and heart conditions or diabetes, the elderly, and women in late pregnancy. It is also advised that persons working in essential industries and public service occupations be vaccinated as in-

surance against absenteeism. In normally healthy people the disease is seldom serious unless complications develop. Illness is sudden and generally lasts no more than two or three days. Symptoms include chills and fever, aches and pains, and discomfort and prostration.

THERE IS NO specific treatment that is of any value, although certain remedies may be employed to make the patient more comfortable. Should complications occur, however, specific medications are in order. It is recommended that the individual go to bed at the on-

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set of illness and stay away from work or school until a physician considers recovery complete.

If influenza follows its customary pattern, an epidemic of the disease is due in Los Angeles County in the winter months immediately ahead. It is wise to be prepared for its coming.

A pamphlet on influenza will be mailed to anyone who sends a card of request to the Division of Health Education, Los Angeles County Health Department, 241 N. Figueroa St., Los Angeles 12.

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