

health sense



Fall/Winter 2012



Test your flu facts

There's one thing we all know about the flu: It makes us miserable. But do you know how it spreads? How to prevent it?

Test what you know about the flu with this short true-or-false quiz.

Questions:

1. Flu spreads from person to person.
2. You need a flu shot every year.
3. Everyone who gets the flu should go to the emergency department.
4. As soon as your fever is gone, it's OK to go back to work.

Answers:

1. True. Flu germs pass from one person to another in tiny droplets made when people cough, sneeze or talk.

You might also pick up the flu if you touch something that has flu germs on it and then touch your mouth, eyes or nose.

2. True. Germs that cause the

flu change from year to year. Last year's vaccine may not protect you from this year's strain.

Experts say people age 6 months and older should get the shot.

3. False. Most people get over the flu on their own. Some people, though, are at higher risk for complications.

People at higher risk should talk to their provider. They include:

- People age 65 and older.
- Pregnant women.
- Kids age 5 years and younger.
- People with breathing problems, heart trouble, diabetes or other long-term health issues.

WALK-IN FLU SHOT CLINICS

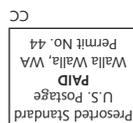
Antioch Health Center	Oct. 17, 18, 24, 25	6 to 8 p.m.
Concord Health Center	Oct. 15, 17, 22, 24	6 to 8 p.m.
Martinez Health Center	Oct. 15 to 19, 20, 22 to 26	9 a.m. to noon
Pittsburg Health Center	Oct. 15 to 17, 22, 23	5:30 to 8:30 p.m.
	Oct. 20, 27	9 a.m. to noon
Richmond Health Center	Oct. 15 to 19, 20, 22 to 26	8 a.m. to noon

Of course, if you're worried about your illness, talk with your provider. He or she may advise you to take medicine that can help make the flu milder and shorter.

4. False. Stay home and away from people for at least 24 hours after your fever goes away.

Even if you don't have a fever, you could still spread the flu if you have other flu symptoms.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention





Checkups: Good for kids and parents

Parents like helpful tips about how to raise happy and healthy kids.

Here's an important one: Be sure your child has regular checkups.

These visits are key. They help you get to know your child's provider. They also are the best way to make sure your child:

- Is growing and developing as expected.
- Gets the shots he or she needs. The shots help protect against childhood illnesses.

- Has his or her eyes, speech and hearing checked. All 3 are crucial for learning.

- Is eating well.

- Stays healthy and safe.

Checkups also allow your child's provider to spot any possible health problems. Knowing about any troubles early helps you decide what to do.

Checkups are a good time to ask for advice about parenting too. Be sure to keep a list of questions you have. Take it with you to each checkup.

Not sure what to do? Call the Advice Nurse

You want to see your provider for regular visits. It can help you and your kids stay well.

But there may still be times you or a loved one is sick or hurt. That's when you can call the Advice Nurse. An Advice Nurse can help you decide if you:

- Need medical care right away.
- Can wait to see your provider.

An Advice Nurse can also tell you:

- What to do before you go to the emergency room.
- What to do at home if emergency care is not needed.

You can reach an Advice Nurse 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling **877-661-6230 (press 1)**. Most calls are answered in less than a minute.

Staying on track. Your provider will suggest how often to plan visits. Many recommend this checkup schedule for kids:

Before age 1: 3 to 5 days after leaving the hospital, then at 1, 2, 4, 6, 9 and 12 months.

Between ages 1 and 2: At 15, 18 and 24 months.

Toddlers and young children: At 2½, 3 and 4 years old.

Grade-schoolers: Once a year from ages 5 to 10.

Teens and young adults: Once a year from ages 11 to 21.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

How we work to improve your care

Contra Costa Health Plan is working to improve the care and service you receive. We do this through quality improvement projects (QIPs). We choose some projects. Others are required by programs such as Medi-Cal.

One recent QIP was about avoiding emergency room (ER) use. Our goal was to teach members when to go to the ER and when to call their doctor instead. We taught members about their options for getting care. And we taught them when it's OK to treat an illness at home. We also asked them to call our Advice Nurses if they are not sure what to do. At the end, our data showed that this teaching was a success.

For another QIP, we talked to doctors about treating kids with weight problems. We had several training sessions for them. And we made new handouts for them to share with their patients. We also made new forms for doctors to use during kids' checkups. The number of doctors who look for weight problems went up. So did the number of members who got advice about eating right and being active. And we helped doctors learn how to give better care to Hispanic families dealing with weight problems.

Right now we are working on a QIP to make sure pregnant women get care in the first 3 months of pregnancy. We also want more



new moms to see their doctor for a checkup 3 to 8 weeks after they have a baby. We are looking at the services these women have now. And we are looking at our data to decide how we can best improve.

Soon we will start a QIP to help keep people from needing to go back into the hospital after they've been sent home. Right now we are in the planning stage. We will keep you up-to-date on our progress.

Care Transitions Improvement Program

Contra Costa Health Plan has a program to help members move from one facility to the next. For instance, this might be from the hospital to your home.

It's called the Care Transitions Improvement Program. Members who sign up meet with a health coach. This will take place before they leave the hospital. The coach can:

- Answer questions about the process.
- Be there for support.
- Help members learn about their condition.
- Help members make a plan for future care.

This program is free. Members can choose if they want to take part.



1 Be choosy about carbohydrates. Carbs can boost a brain chemical that helps you feel calm. They might also help ease depression. But you have to eat the right ones. So go for whole-grain breads, brown rice, oatmeal, fruits and veggies. Go easy on white starchy foods. This includes white bread and rice. And limit sugary foods, such as cookies, candy and soda. These carbs may make you moody.



2 Pick protein. Is it mealtime? Do you feel like a snack? Be sure to have some protein. You'll feel full longer. And this can help make mood swings less likely. Protein can also help you feel alert. Choose lean protein that's good for your heart. Good picks include skinless poultry, low-fat milk products and lean cuts of red meat.

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good-for-you foods

to beat the blues

You know that what you eat affects your body. But here's a surprise: Food can also affect your mood.

Say you feel cranky or tired. Changing how you eat might help you feel better. Why? Some foods can help change your brain chemistry and lift your spirits. For a better mood, try these 5 tips.



3 Get your omega-3s. Foods rich in these fatty acids can boost your mood. They can also keep you safe from a heart attack or stroke. Oily fish, such as salmon and sardines, are good sources. So are walnuts, ground flaxseeds, soy nuts and canola oil.



4 Factor in folate and B vitamins. Low levels of folate and vitamin B₁₂ in your body may be tied to depression. So dish up lots of folate-rich food. Enjoy some broccoli, beans, oranges, avocados or spinach. For vitamin B₁₂, try wild salmon (fresh or canned), lean beef or eggs. Breakfast cereal is also fortified with both of these vitamins. Just be sure it's whole-grain.



5 Dial into vitamin D. Low levels of vitamin D may be linked with SAD. That's short for seasonal affective disorder. It's a type of depression that some people get in the winter. Fatty fish, like salmon, has vitamin D. Most milk has vitamin D added to it. And some yogurt, orange juice and soy drinks have it added to them too.

Source: American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

4 ways to eat better on a budget

Next time you go grocery shopping, add these 2 items to your list: » Save money.

» Eat healthier.

Yes—you can do both. Some ideas that can help:

1. Plan ahead. Check newspaper inserts and online for coupons and specials—but only for foods on your shopping list.

Then, plan a few meals around items that are on sale.

2. Buy in season. Look for fresh, seasonal produce. It usually tastes the best and is the most affordable. Check out your local farmer’s market too.

3. Buy in bulk. Bulk bins can be an affordable place to find:

- Dried beans and lentils. Add these to salads or pastas for a great nonmeat source of protein and fiber. As an added bonus: dried beans don’t have the salt often added to the canned kind. Soak beans for a few hours to reduce cooking time.

- Whole grains like brown rice, oatmeal, whole-wheat pasta and barley.

These staples add fiber to your diet and stretch meals such as soups, stews and casseroles further.

4. Go big when it makes sense—and small when it doesn’t. With both frozen and fresh produce, buy whole food items in larger bags. Then repackage them in smaller bags at home.

Also, consider asking a friend to split the cost of bulk or large-sized items that you won’t use up.

Otherwise, buy only the amount your family will eat. And, when you try new things, buy them in small amounts at first so foods won’t go to waste.

Sources: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; U.S. Department of Agriculture

Beans and grains are a great way to stretch meals further.

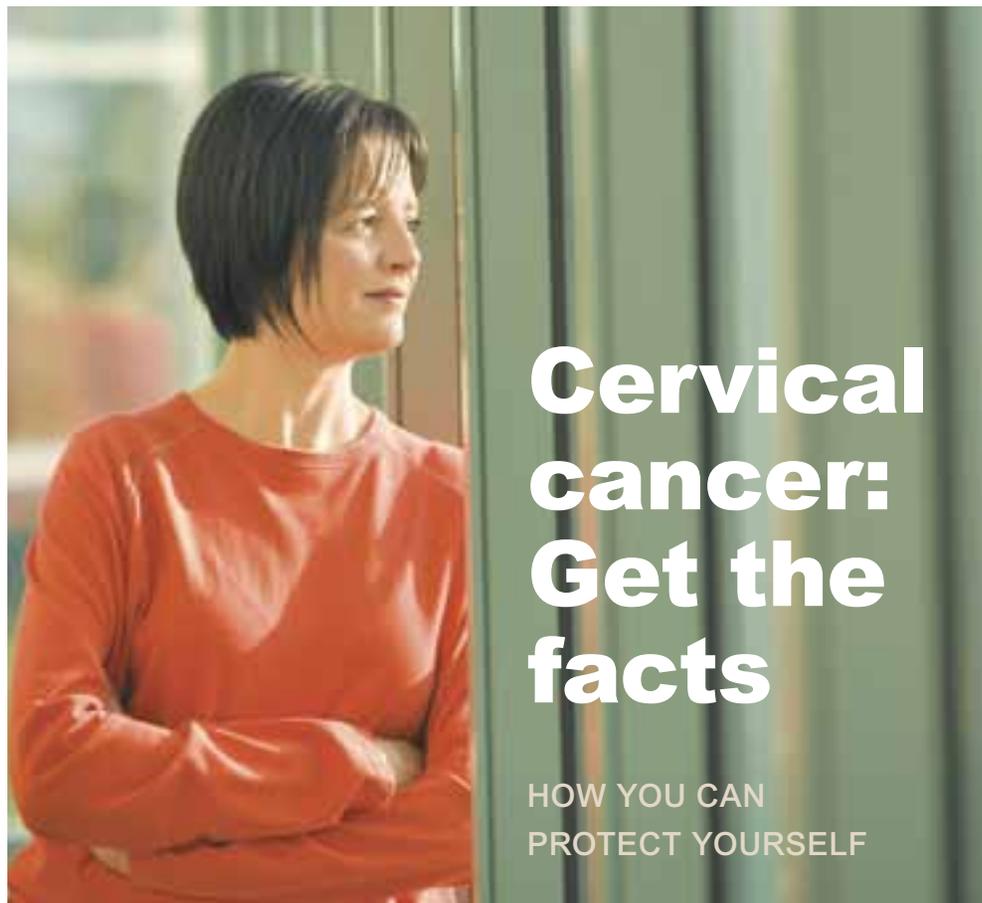


Timely access to care

You matter. When you are sick or injured, we want to make sure you get care. Contra Costa Health Plan has standards to make sure you get the timely care you need. Here are the timely access standards we try to meet.

Type of visit	Wait time
Routine or follow-up	10 working days
Items such as x-rays, medicines, lab tests, rehab	15 working days
Mental health	10 working days
Specialist	15 working days
Urgent care (for things that don’t need prior approval)	48 hours
Urgent care (for things that do need prior approval)	96 hours
Emergency	Right away

NOTE: There are times when it may take longer to schedule a visit. For instance, if it won’t hurt your health, you may be asked to wait. It must be noted in your record that a longer wait time will not hurt you. If you feel you need care right away and you are having trouble making an appointment, please call our Advice Nurse at **877-661-6230 (press 1)**.



Cervical cancer: Get the facts

HOW YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF

What does an abnormal Pap test mean?

You're nervous. That's normal if you just found out that your Pap test results were abnormal. But try not to worry too much.

Abnormal results don't always mean cancer. Yes, a Pap test might have found unhealthy cells in your cervix, the lower part of your womb. But very often, these cells go away on their own. What's more, if more serious changes were found, treatment can help keep you healthy.

Still, don't take chances. Be sure to have any other tests your provider suggests.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

There are 2 things to keep in mind about cervical cancer.

First, this cancer can be life-threatening. Second—and more important—it can be prevented.

To help you learn more, here are answers to some common questions about this cancer.

Q. What is cervical cancer?

A. It's a cancer that affects only women. It happens when normal cells in the cervix change into cancerous ones. The cervix is the lower part of the womb.

Q. What causes it?

A. Mostly, it's caused by a virus. This virus is called human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV can be passed through sex. There are

many types of HPV. But only some can cause cancer.

Q. How can cervical cancer be prevented?

A. One way is to have regular Pap tests. A Pap test can spot abnormal changes in cells in the cervix before cancer develops. Treatment can then stop cancer from developing. Ask your provider when you should be tested.

Also ask about the HPV vaccines. They protect against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical cancer. The shots work best when given to women and girls before they have sex for the first time.

Q. How else can I protect myself?

A. Be safe when it comes to sex. Have sex with only one

partner. Ask your partner to do the same. And use a condom every time you have sex.

Q. What are the signs of cervical cancer?

A. You might bleed or have watery discharge from your vagina.

But often there aren't any symptoms. That's why Pap tests are important. Regular testing can often find cancer early enough for it to be cured.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

» TAKE ACTION. Thinking about getting an HPV vaccine? Call Member Services to find out if your benefits cover these vaccines.

LONG LIFE

Get fit— 10 minutes at a time

Getting in shape doesn't require a lot of time all at once. You can be active in 10-minute chunks through the day.

A series of short walks during the day, along with lifting hand weights a couple of days a week, for instance, can add up. Before you know it, you're on your way to feeling better and having more energy.

Living stronger. Regular, moderate exercise can help offset some of the changes that come with aging. These include the loss of strength and stamina. And when you stay strong and fit, it's easier to keep doing what you love. It's also easier to keep doing daily tasks on your own.

Staying active can also help:

- Control blood pressure.
- Control weight.
- Reduce the risk for heart disease, stroke and other problems.
- Improve sleep and mood.

Has it been a while since you've been active? Do you have any health problems? If so, ask your doctor what types of exercise are safe for you.

About those 10 minutes. For all-around fitness, you will need 4 basic types of activity:

1. Aerobic. Brisk walking, cycling and swimming are good choices.



You'll need at least 150 minutes of these a week. Again, you can meet that goal in 10-minute chunks. For example, you might be active 3 times a day, 5 days a week. Or you can get 75 minutes of vigorous activity, such as jogging and running, throughout the week.

2. Strength. Lifting weights or stretching special bands are 2 options. Aim to do at least 1 set (8 to 12 reps) of these on 2 or more days a week. Work all major muscle groups.

3. Balance. Standing from a seated position and walking backwards

are 2 examples. Aim to do these at least 3 days a week.

4. Flexibility. Move through some stretches when your muscles are warmed up.

Doing more than these amounts can be even better. Just be sure to start slowly and build a little at a time.

And one final tip: Choose activities you enjoy. That way, you'll be more likely to keep them up. You might even look forward to your exercise breaks.

Stay safe from West Nile virus



West Nile virus can make you very sick. Unlike the flu or a cold, it is not spread by touching or kissing a person who has it. You can get the virus if a mosquito that has it bites you. Mosquitoes get the virus from feeding on birds that have it. They can then spread the virus to people and other animals when they bite.

Here are some tips to keep you and your family safe from West Nile virus:

- Empty any standing water around your home, such as puddles, flowerpots and gutters. Mosquitoes breed in any water that is still for more than 4 days.
- Mosquitoes are most active around sunrise and sunset. If you have to be outside during these times, wear long sleeves and pants.
- Use bug spray. Make sure it includes DEET, picaridin or oil of

lemon eucalyptus. Always follow the label.

- Make sure your door and window screens do not have holes. This will keep bugs from getting into your house.

- If you see any dead birds and it is not clear why the bird died, you should report it. Dead birds may be a sign that the virus is in the area. Call **877-WNV-BIRD** or **877-968-2473** to report any dead birds.

To learn more, please visit:

- Contra Costa Mosquito & Vector Control District: www.contracostamosquito.com or call **925-771-6196**

- Contra Costa Health Services: www.cchealth.org/topics/west_nile
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile

Source: www.contracostamosquito.com



Try a stir-fry

Stir-frying is an easy way to cook healthy foods without a lot of fat. And it's quick.

First, chop some vegetables. Good choices: **onions, peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, zucchini and mushrooms.**

Then thinly slice some **lean meat, chicken** or **fish**. Or cut up **firm tofu**.

Next, heat a heavy skillet or wok and

coat the bottom with a little bit of **oil**. Use no more than 1 or 2 teaspoons.

Now it's time to add the food, stirring constantly. Start with meat, chicken, fish or tofu. Cook until done.

Add the vegetables and cook until they are tender but still crisp and bright in color.

Season with soy sauce or spices, and serve over brown rice.