Influenza
Influenza or "the flu" is a contagious respiratory infection that usually peaks in the winter months. Most of the time, influenza is not a serious health risk. However, for the elderly or those with chronic medical problems, influenza can result in more serious complications, such as pneumonia.

Symptoms of influenza usually occur a few days after being exposed to the virus. Typical symptoms include fever, chills, sore throat, cough and muscle aches. These symptoms are similar to colds but typically are more severe and last longer.

Should you contract the flu virus, bed rest and fluids are the best treatment. Antibiotics will not prevent the flu, but there is medication that can lessen the severity of the flu if started within 48 hours of symptoms.

The flu vaccine can be helpful, but isn’t perfect. The vaccine is not always successful in preventing the illness and does not protect against flu complications. Those who have an allergy to eggs should avoid the vaccine. Also, the vaccine is only effective for one year, as the viral strains vary from year to year, making it essential to get the shot annually.

Frostbite
Frostbite can occur during prolonged exposure to cold temperatures. When someone starts to get frostbite, the blood vessels close to the skin constrict and shunt blood away from the extremities to the body’s core. This lack of blood leads to the eventual freezing and damage to the skin in affected areas. The parts of the body most affected by frostbite are the hands, feet, ears and nose. When skin is frostbitten, it appears whitish and can start to feel numb.

To treat frostbite, warm the affected area gradually. Wrap the area in a warm blanket, coat or sweater. If frostbite becomes severe, seek urgent medical attention.

Michael Liston Jr., M.D., is a board-certified family practice physician at Palos Medical Group. To schedule an appointment with Dr. Liston, please call (708) 403-8400 or visit www.PalosCommunityHospital.org/PMG
Since cramped living quarters and community showers are the norm in most campus dorms, college students often are exposed to more germs than normal and frequently get sick.

“Maintaining good hygiene, particularly regular hand washing with soap and water, is the mainstay for disease prevention,” says Andrius Kudirka, M.D., a board-certified family practice physician with Palos Medical Group in Orland Park. “Regular exercise, adequate sleep and a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables will help build the immune system, and put students in a better position to fight off infection.”

Dr. Kudirka suggests making sure students have their medication available, especially if there is a chronic condition like asthma, severe allergies or diabetes. He recommends getting prescription refills at a pharmacy near college. “I often get calls from students who forgot their inhaler or allergy meds at home, it can be bad for your health and a hassle to get meds at the last minute. Take care of everything ahead of time so you have meds when you need them.”

Stress and social pressures

It’s no surprise alcohol and drug use is prevalent in college, which is why it’s important to keep an open line of communication. Students should feel safe asking their parents for advice.

“Students should be aware that binge drinking (a rite of passage for many college students) puts them at increased risk of injury, assault and alcohol poisoning,” says Dr. Kudirka, who pleads with students to not drink and drive. “Consider a buddy system. Look out for your friends, don’t let them keep drinking if they are getting drunk and make sure they get home safely.”

If drinking or drugs interfere with grades and class attendance, Dr. Kudirka recommends getting help through student health.

Dr. Kudirka’s approach to medicine is one of communication and prevention. “I’m a big proponent of prevention,” he says. And the best way to encourage prevention is through open communication. His office is located in the Palos Primary Care Center South, 15300 West Avenue, Suite 221, Orland Park. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please contact Palos Medical Group at (708) 590-5300 or visit us on the web at www.PalosCommunityHospital.org/PMG.
In winter, it’s even more important to get plenty of the sunshine drug

The onset of winter means we’ll be feeling less of the sun’s warmth and with that comes a decrease in beneficial vitamin D.

In the past few years, a number of medical studies have suggested there may be more to the sunshine drug than meets the eye.

“We mostly need vitamin D to help us absorb calcium and phosphorus and keep our bones healthy,” says Andree de Bustros, M.D., an endocrinologist with Palos Medical Group. “In children, severe vitamin D deficiency causes rickets. For adults, it causes a softening of the bones called osteomalacia. Milder degrees of the deficiency cause bone loss, aches and pains, and muscle weakening resulting in falls and fractures, particularly in the elderly.”

Receptors for vitamin D are found in nearly every single cell in the body, and researchers are learning it may be critical in preventing not only bone deformities and osteoporosis, but also diabetes, autoimmune disorders, chronic pain, depression, heart disease, cancer and even death.

Research shows roughly 50 percent of Americans simply don’t get enough vitamin D, a hormone your body manufactures through a process triggered by direct sunlight. And as the weather gets colder, clothes become the barrier to vitamin D production.

“If you are living north of the equator, don’t get outside much, use sunscreen when you are in the sun between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. — which you should do to avoid skin cancer, and especially if you are overweight and have dark skin, chances are you are deficient in vitamin D and need to add a supplement to your diet all year long,” says Dr. de Bustros.

Getting your dose of D

Vitamin D can be found in some foods, including fortified milk and dairy products, orange juice, breakfast cereals, shiitake mushrooms, salmon, sardines and tuna. Most people must add a supplement to their diets to get the daily recommended amounts of vitamin D.

“Vitamin D is easily absorbed and because of its long half-life can be given daily, weekly or monthly,” says Dr. de Bustros.

In November 2010, the Food & Drug Administration’s Institute of Medicine increased its recommended daily allowance of vitamin D to 600 IUs a day for people younger than 70. Those 71 and older need as much as 800 IUs. The National Osteoporosis Foundation raised its recommendation as well, to between 400 and 800 IUs a day for people younger than 50, and between 800 to 1,000 for people 50 and older. Other organizations such as the Endocrine Society feel 1000 to 2000 IUs per day would be more appropriate.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children receive 400 IUs a day.

“If you are a current Palos Medical Group patient and think you may have a vitamin D deficiency, please talk with your primary care physician about getting a 25-OH vitamin D test, which can be performed along with your annual blood work. If you are new to PMG, please call (708) 403-8400.

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— Andree de Bustros, M.D.
HEART SCREENINGS FOR YOUNG ATHLETES

Between 6,000 and 8,000 students die every year in the United States from undetected heart conditions, according to the National Athletic Trainers’ Association. The problem is routine sports physicals have only a 3- to 6- percent sensitivity rate for detecting the cardiac conditions that lead to sudden cardiac arrest and death in youth. However, when given in conjunction with the Sportlink Heart Exam, that sensitivity rate increases to 90 percent.

The Sportlink Heart Exam is a fully directed echocardiogram and 12-lead EKG specifically tailored for the athlete’s heart. The results provide physicians with critical comprehensive cardiac information to supplement the routine sports physical. And at a cost of $99, it’s an affordable way to ensure the health of your child.

Palos Medical Group has partnered with Sportlink to offer free sports physicals to any patient who receives the Sportlink Heart Exam. For more information, visit www.SportlinkHeart.com.

Welcome to the fifth edition of PMG Health, a newsletter designed specifically for the patients of Palos Medical Group. Four times a year, PMG Health will deliver advice and insights on the best ways to stay healthy and prevent disease.

In this issue, Family Practice Physician Michael Liston Jr., M.D., prepares you for the winter weather ahead with tips to keep you healthy. And with the onset of winter we’ll be feeling less of the sun’s warmth and with that comes a decrease in beneficial vitamin D. Read about the importance of getting enough of the sunshine drug, vitamin D. Do you know someone making the transition to college life? If so, Family Practice Physician Andrius Kudirka, M.D., has some suggestions to help them ease into the first year of college.

Specializing in family practice, obstetrics and gynecology, breast health, behavioral health and endocrinology, Palos Medical Group’s family of physicians are some of the most experienced and respected in the southwest suburbs. If you have questions about your health or would like to schedule an appointment, please call (708) 403-8400 or visit us online at www.PalosCommunityHospital.org/PMG.

We hope you have a happy and healthy winter!

Living on the Border: Diabetes Prevention

Are you concerned you may be at risk for diabetes? Get the facts on diabetes prevention at this program led by a Palos certified diabetes educator.

Tailored for people with prediabetes, including those with a parent or sibling with diabetes, this class offers strategies for lifestyle modification to help you eat a healthy diet and lose weight. Losing just five to 10 percent of your body weight can make a difference in delaying or preventing diabetes.

6 to 7 p.m. Monday, January 6
Palos Primary Care Center, 15300 West Avenue, Orland Park
Registration Fee: $20
To register or learn more about this event, please call (708) 226-2330.

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