Do YOU have the FLU?

Influenza, or “the Flu,” has been spreading more rapidly in the past several weeks in our region and around the U.S. It is extremely important to make sure that you are properly prepared to deal with either having the flu or being around people who have the flu. Here are some important things to remember:

I. The influenza vaccine is still your best defense against getting the flu, even if this season’s vaccine is not perfectly matched. It will still be protective against some of the circulating flu strains, and will boost your overall influenza immunity.

II. If you suspect that you might have the flu, you should be checked out by a medical provider as soon as possible. Here are the main signs and symptoms of flu infection:

- Fever (typically >101°F) *
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea (less common)

You may have the flu if you are experiencing several or all of the above symptoms. *It is important to note that not EVERYone who has flu will have fever, although it is among the most common symptoms.

The CDC advises that it is not necessary to seek medical treatment for flu symptoms if they are relatively mild, and that the most important thing you can do is to stay home and avoid exposing others to the virus. For students, we recommend that you go home to recuperate if at all possible. As with most illnesses, you need to get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids, particularly water. If you have had fever, you should avoid contact with others until at least 24 hours after the fever has stopped, without the use of Tylenol or other fever-reducing medications. (Of course, you should treat your fever and other symptoms while you are experiencing them, but be aware of when that treatment is no longer needed.) Attention to hand-washing and hand sanitizing, particularly when out in public areas, is essential to prevent catching or transmitting the flu.

IF YOU ARE IN A HIGH RISK GROUP, or if your symptoms are severe, you should seek medical attention. High risk includes people aged 65 and older, children under age 5, pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions. These include asthma or other lung disease, heart disease, weakened immune systems due to illness or particular medications, diabetes, metabolic disorders, and liver, kidney or blood disorders.

If you have additional questions, the CDC website (cdc.gov) has lots of excellent information. Of course, you can always ask your own health care provider, as well.