



# TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER

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## **Taking charge of protecting yourself against the flu**

*by Maj. (Dr.) Paul Ciminera, Deputy Chief of Preventive Medicine  
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While getting the H1N1 vaccine is the single, best way to prevent getting sick from the flu, there is no cure-all, “silver bullet.”

Human life is a remarkable system of trillions of cells working in a system of checks and balances to keep us healthy. When we are healthy, they are working well together. When we feel sick, vital organs, like our lung cells, are being overwhelmed by abnormal conditions like an H1N1 virus infection.

Today’s vaccines use inert or weakened forms of a virus to prime the body’s natural defense mechanisms to produce the right antibodies to fight infection. When a more active form of the virus gets into the body, the body is ready to react more quickly to fight it.

The body has other automatic defense mechanisms. A low-grade fever (heat) can slow the growth of a viral infection, so that other defense mechanisms like virus-destroying white blood cells have more time to do their work.

The body’s defenses sometimes work against each other. A fever that is too high may damage cells and cause other serious complications. When this happens, a fever-reducing drug like Motrin<sup>®</sup> or Tylenol<sup>®</sup> may be needed. Aspirin should never be given to children with fever due to influenza.

Different germs and viruses grow better in certain areas of our body, and not so well in others. For example, flu viruses don’t enter the body through skin cuts and abrasions, as do hepatitis viruses.

Flu viruses grow well in our air passages like the throat and lungs. Keeping the virus from getting into them with good hygiene habits will reduce the chance of getting the flu. Noses, mouths and eyes are the primary pathways to our throats and lungs.

Good hygiene habits:

- washing hands thoroughly,
- sneezing in tissues or into sleeves, and
- keeping fingers away from mouths, from rubbing eyes, from touching noses

These habits are simple and effective. Simple but habits are hard to change. If you have habits that need to be changed, remind yourself constantly, until they are second nature.