

Fighting the



BY KRISTEN DE DEYN KIRK

You might be wishing for a time machine. It's January, and everyone around you is sneezing and coughing. The group at your children's bus stop grows smaller by the day and, yesterday, you only needed half the number of chairs you usually require at your staff meeting. Your co-workers were too sick to come in.

If you had a time machine, you could zoom back to November – or maybe

even September -- and get flu shots to protect you and your family.

"If someone has received a flu shot in a prior year, the shot ideally should be given in the fall. Some providers

recommend waiting until November so that immunity will be highest during the peak of the flu season, which is usually in January, February," says Dr. Christine Turley, vice chair of clinical services, director of clinical trials and clinical research, and a lead researcher testing a universal flu vaccine at the University of Texas Medical Branch's Sealy Center for Vaccine Development. "However, if the flu season is early, then an individual risks having no protection."

But you could still benefit from getting a flu shot this season:

"Most doctors recommend receiving one at any point during the season, even through February or even March," Dr. Turley continues, "since the season can run long or late some years."

You need a flu vaccine every year, because they offer protection against only certain strains of influenza. Children from 6 months to 8 years old who receive the flu vaccine for the first time need two doses separated



by one month. New research released in December shows that some people might be able to receive only a half dose of a flu shot if they received a full shot the year before.

When vaccine designers match flu shots well with the flu strains that are circulating in the environment, the vaccine will prevent 70 to 90 percent of true influenza infections in healthy adults, says Dr. Turley.

(If you got a shot and got sick, don't be so quick to think your shot didn't work. The issue is "true" infection, Dr. Turley

explains. Many other respiratory viruses circulate during the winter

that are not influenza, and the flu shot only offers protection against the three

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Protect yourself and the people you love further by asking the people who help your infant children and your elderly parents to get a flu shot.

"This creates a protective zone around those whose immune systems may not be as strong," Dr. Turley notes.

And no matter how guilty your boss makes you feel or how much your child wants that perfect attendance ribbon, adopt this policy and stick to it: Stay home when you're sick.

"There is tremendous pressure on families to drop their kids at daycare or school while they are sick," says Dr. Charlotte



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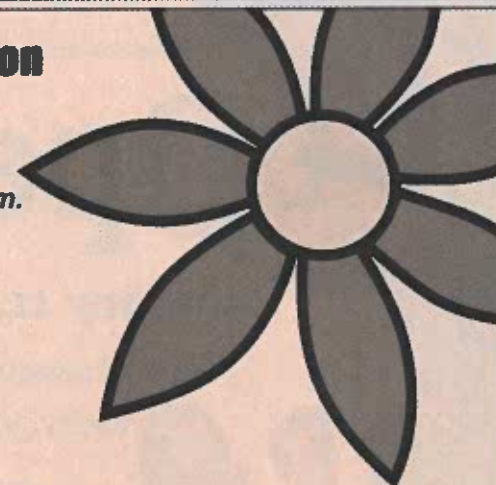
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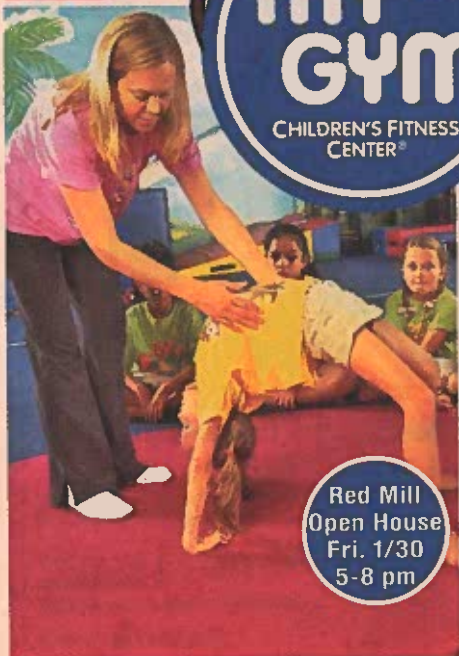
Cowan, a pediatrician and author of the Dr. Hippo series of picture books for sick children. "This is counterproductive, allowing the spread of infectious disease."



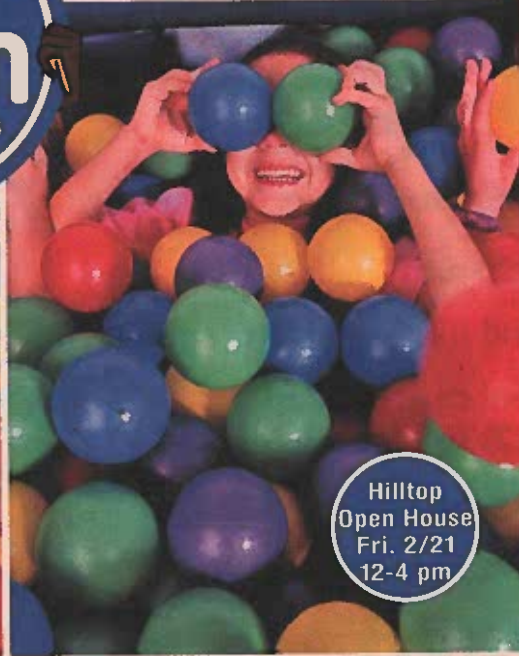




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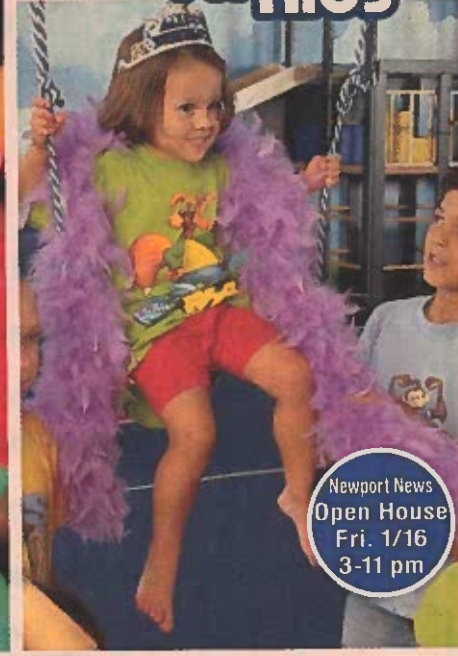
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Stay put, and ask your doctor for help.

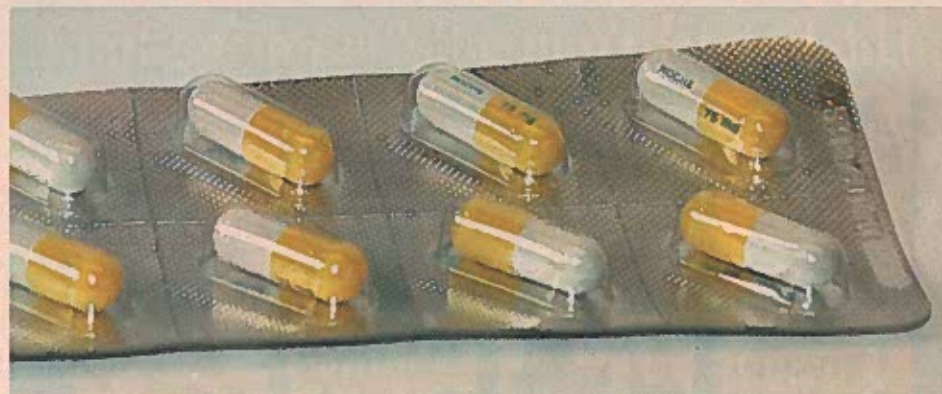
Amy Hendel, a physician's assistant and author, says that doctors can prescribe Tamiflu to reduce symptoms and possibly the length of your flu. Get it quickly: You must take Tamiflu within 48 hours of your first symptom for it to work best.

"There's also Elderberry, an over-the-counter herbal preparation that seems to work like Tamiflu," says Hendel.

Check with your doctor if you have questions about over-the-counter medicines. Tylenol helps with aches and pains, and fluids keep flu sufferers hydrated.

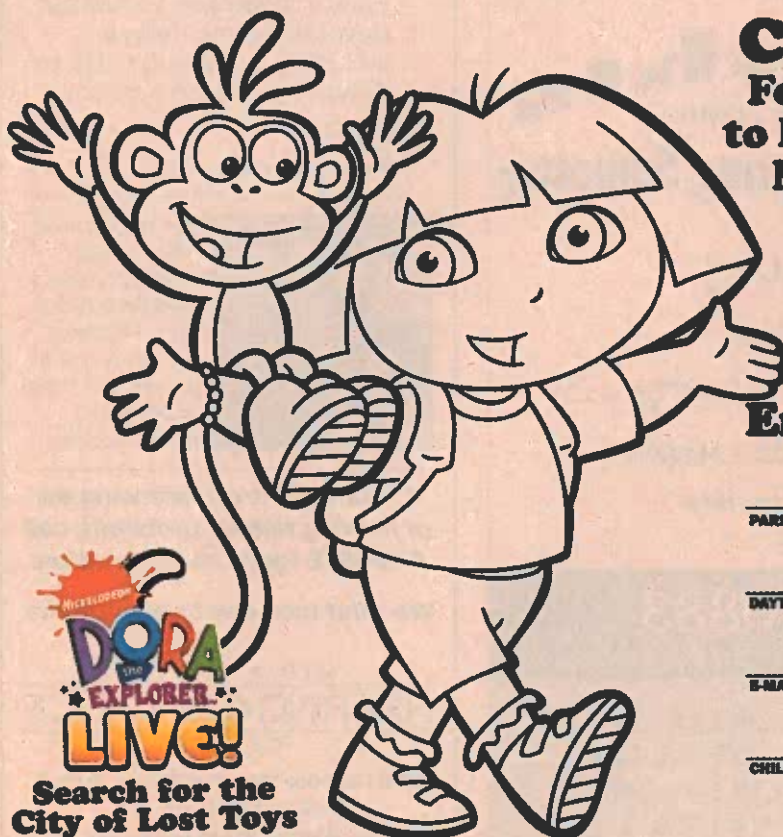
Monitor yourself and your children closely. William Schaffner, a professor and chair in the department of preventive medicine chair at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and a member of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, notes that the flu causes over 200,000 hospitalizations every year and over 36,000 deaths.

"Some of them are children," he says.



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Dr. Turley advises watching for lightheadedness) or failure to make any improvement within three to five days. "These are signs that a person should seek medical attention," she advises. **P**



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