Flu season nothing to sneeze at

Due to an early peak, this year’s flu season has been characterized by health officials as severe and widespread, and our email box has been inundated with announcements from the medical community with information about this year’s flu strain and instructions on how to care for yourself and family members. We’ve summarized these announcements to help keep our readers informed and, hopefully, protected.

The best defense against the flu is a flu shot. It’s not too late. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that everyone six months of age and older receive the flu shot that will provide protection against this year’s virulent strain, which, according to Dr. Sarah Haessler of the Infectious Disease Division at Baystate Medical Center, can remain in the area through April. Busting through the biggest myth about flu – the vaccine does not cause the flu; still, it does take about two weeks for it to become fully effective, so there is a chance that if you are exposed, you may still suffer symptoms.

Other protections against infection include frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

The flu is a virus, so antibiotics cannot treat it. Still, there are steps you can take to treat symptoms that include high fever lasting three to five days, severe body aches, headache, fatigue, sore throat, cough, runny or stuffy nose, and vomiting and/or diarrhea, particularly in small children. First – rest – stay at home, and stay in bed. This will help you to recover more quickly and avoid working or school will keep the flu virus from spreading to others; drink plenty of fluids, water or juice, to avoid dehydration; take non-aspirin pain relievers to reduce fever and pain.

Seek medical attention immediately if more severe symptoms develop, including “fast breathing, trouble breathing or bluish skin color; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, confusion or sudden dizziness; not drinking enough fluids, not being able to eat, or severe or persistent vomiting; flu-like symptoms that have not improved but then return with fever and worse symptoms; signs of dehydration such as drowsiness, a sunken look in the eyes, or a dry mouth; or a fever of 100.4°F or higher for two days or more.”

Community Field restoration deserves recognition

To the Editor,

Praises go out to those of whom are responsible for not only salvaging but also breathing life back into Community Field in Holyoke. This refurbished park is instrumental in bettering the lives of area residents by giving them an area of play that both young and not so young can enjoy. I hope this park revitalization may serve as a model for other communities as to what can be done with parcels of land that have been neglected or shunned aside and forgotten.

The refrigerated skating path is a work of art along with other innovative apparatus.

Now it is up to local residents to conjure up creative new games that can be played on the grounds. What about badminton and willie ball for starters as soon as the dandelions are in bloom come summer? How about adding “Kubb” (a Swedish lawn game) to the roster?

As for now, winter is a time for sledging and skating and skiing, yes skiing! Skiing, simply put, is taking your typical household pet dog wearing a harness and pulling his or her master on cross-country skis.

Whatever vibrant activity suits your style and those you intend on sharing it with, there is now a place you can go to set yourself free!

As one blogger put it, “A field of dreams!”

Bill Paul, Chicopee

More info on needle exchange

To the Editor,

At the meeting on Aug. 14, 2012, Kevin Cranston from DPH presented a report indicating there were 301 individuals living with AIDS in Holyoke as of Dec. 31, 2011 and that 39 percent or 117 self-reported that injection drug use was the exposure mode. Then, in November, Tim Purington, director of the needle exchange program for Tapestry and former city councilor stated on television channel 22, that there were 200 individuals registered with the needle exchange program. By December, at a recent Board of Health meeting, he reported 300 individuals registered with this program.

These numbers appear to support the assertion by those that say this program is drawing drug users who inject drugs to our community from other communities.

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