Get the shot, practice good hygiene, minimize spread of the flu

By Military Health Systems Public Affairs

It's February, we're in the midst of flu season, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have reported that Tamiflu, a very common anti-flu medication, is resistant to one of the three seasonal flu viruses.

Great news, right?

Tamiflu is a "big gun" in combating flu. It's used widely to prevent flu and control outbreaks in certain environments, like nursing homes or hospitals. News of the drug's reduced effectiveness means that vaccination and proper hygiene are now even more important.

Germs are everywhere. But if you use good hygiene practices, you are doing your part in minimizing the spread of the flu.

Keep your distance. Avoiding close contact with people with the flu, or, if you catch the flu, reduce the chance of passing the infection to others by keeping your distance from others.

Wash your hands. The CDC says it is best to wash your hands with soap and clean running water for 20 seconds (About the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice). If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based product to clean your hands. You should wash your hands:

- Before preparing or eating food.
- After using to the restroom.
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom.
- Before and after tending to someone who is sick.
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- After handling an animal or animal waste.
- After handling garbage.
- Before and after treating a cut or wound.

A hospital corpsman administers an influenza vaccination (flu shot) to a Sailor at U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka. USNH Yokosuka provides healthcare and preventive medicine services to the forward-deployed U.S. 7th Fleet and their beneficiaries.

U.S. Navy file photo

Stay home if you are sick. Don't come into work if you have flu symptoms.

Get vaccinated. The best way to prevent getting the flu is to get vaccinated, and it is not too late. Find a flu clinic or ask your healthcare provider for more information.

Elmo from Sesame Street Workshop explains deployments to kids

By LIFELines Service Network

The Sesame Street Workshop has produced a video product to help parents or loved ones explain military deployment to young children. Elmo, one of Sesame Street's most beloved characters is the spokesman.

Free copies of the DVD called "Talk, Listen, Connect: Helping Military Families During Deployment" is available to military families and may be downloaded from the Internet at the Sesame Workshop Web site www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc/.

As military families know, explaining deployment to small children is about as hard as talking about death or divorce. When a parent suddenly disappears, for whatever reason, kids don't understand. Explanations that are complete and truthful are always too complicated. As a result, the Military Child Education Coalition, in conjunction with the New York State office of Mental Health teamed with Elmo to say it right.

The program was produced in partnership with and funded by Wal-Mart at a cost of $1.5 million.

"Our goal is to really get military families with young children ... to talk about the different stages of deployment with their children, not only talk about it but prepare them for it," said Jeanette Betancourt, vice president of content design at Sesame Workshop, which produces Sesame Street.

Moses Rogers, a Navy reservist and father of two, participated in the program. He said being part of the DVD project made him think about deployments in a new light.

"I think the lesson that I got personally was, separating from your family is really hard, but if you communicate with each other, that is good."

Rogers says his best advice to parents is, "Talk to your children. Let them know what's going on. Let them know that you're going somewhere to help somebody."

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Image courtesy of www.sesameworkshop.org

USO Yokosuka offers free preview of latest TV special – USO Yokosuka is offering a free preview of the latest Sesame Street TV special "Coming home: Military families cope with change," at 10 a.m, March 28 at Benny Decker Theater. Contact the USO Yokosuka Center Operations Manager Danaë Hoekstra at 241-3030 or dhoekstra@uso.org for more information.

TRICARE grants extension for overseas claims filing

By Lora Sanders-VanNoy,
TRICARE Pacific Marketing Representative

TRICARE Management Activity has extended its filing deadline for dates of service prior to Dec. 31, 2007 to allow providers, beneficiaries, TRICARE area offices and remote points of contact in overseas locations additional time to submit overdue claims for reimbursement.

Typically, Wisconsin Physician Services (WPS), the overseas claims processor, allows up to one year for claims to be filed from the original date of service. This new extension allows for overdue claims to be filed and received by WPS for processing no later than March 31.

Many filings have been received past the typical one year deadline from overseas locations because some countries give host-nation providers as long as three years to file claims for reimbursement. In addition, some overseas beneficiaries simply are not aware of the one year claims filing policy. Ultimately, it is the beneficiary's responsibility to ensure claims are submitted and processed according to TRICARE policy.

To file an overdue claim, beneficiaries must mail a completed DD Form 2642 with a copy of the itemized bill and receipts to WPS by March 31 for dates of service prior to Dec. 31, 2007. To find the correct address for WPS or to obtain a copy of the DD Form 2642, beneficiaries can log on to www.tricare.mil or contact their local TRICARE Service Center for assistance.