USNH Yokosuka vaccine updates for seasonal, H1N1 flu viruses

By Lt. Patricia Roldan, USNH Yokosuka Immunizations

The seasonal influenza vaccine campaign is underway at U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka. USNH Yokosuka and its branch clinics have already administered more than 15,000 vaccines this season. We expect more doses of the seasonal flu vaccine to arrive shortly to immunize the population between the ages of 6 months and 49 years.

Unfortunately, this year, an unprecedented demand has outstripped supply of the vaccine throughout the world. This has impacted Department of Defense, Navy and civilian facilities. Yokosuka has also been impacted. The anticipated additional supplies may not be enough to immunize all who desire the vaccine.

Vaccinating against the seasonal flu is an important part of protecting our beneficiaries and the general community this season and the hospital is committed to vaccinating as many as supplies will allow. At the same time, we are also focusing our efforts on another health care concern this fall - the H1N1 flu. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), H1N1 is currently the prevalent circulating flu strain. Therefore, vaccinating against H1N1, which is a separate vaccine from seasonal flu, is a top priority. Over time, USNH Yokosuka expects to receive enough H1N1 vaccines to vaccinate all members of the Navy's total force and beneficiaries who want it.

H1N1 vaccinations will begin when the vaccine is available. USNH Yokosuka expects to receive the vaccines in December and will notify the public as soon as they arrive. Because the H1N1 vaccine we anticipate receiving are "inactivated," we can begin immunizing beneficiaries as soon as the vaccine arrives. There is no need to allow time between the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines. The H1N1 vaccine doses that USNH Yokosuka will receive are all injection doses. We will not receive any nasal mist doses of the H1N1 vaccine.

In the meantime, keep practicing personal preventative measures to limit the spread of the seasonal and H1N1 flu such as covering your mouth when you cough, washing your hands often and avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Again, USNH Yokosuka is not alone in this situation. U.S. military and civilian facilities are also facing these same challenges. As a military treatment facility, the health and well being of the Navy's total force and beneficiaries is one of our highest priorities and USNH Yokosuka is committed to providing you the best care possible this flu season. We will continue to keep the community posted as more information on the status of both the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines becomes available. If you have any questions or need more information, call the USNH Yokosuka Preventive Medicine Department at 243-2608.

Healthy eating tips while enjoying the holiday season

By Lt. Amit Sood, USNH Yokosuka

The holidays are a time of celebration, remembrance, family gatherings and giving thanks. For me, the most exciting part of this time of year is the meals that surround all of these events. You will find some of the most extravagant displays of exquisite foods, from your simple deep-fried turkey to your most complex apple-cured salmon or duck breast with foie gras-braised brussels sprouts.

Regardless of what is served, food is often the centerpiece of the holiday season, but that doesn't have to mean unnecessary weight gain and having to buy new clothes to fit into when January comes around. Believe it or not, all foods can fit into a healthy eating plan as long as you keep in mind pre-planning and moderation.

When it comes to going to parties or other social gatherings, it is best to plan ahead. Since you have already made a New Year's resolution about 10 months ago, try to continue with your healthy eating lifestyle by eating small meals or snacks throughout the day instead of rushing to the buffet table when you go to a party. Furthermore, be realistic during this time period and don't try to lose weight. That might stop you from enjoying the delightful foods of the season. Instead, try to achieve a balanced intake of low-calorie foods throughout the day and save the higher calorie foods during the special meals.

Also, if you are the type of person who gains weight every holiday season, perhaps incorporating a little extra physical activity may do the trick and prevent the unwanted pounds. Finally, parties are not all about getting stuffed. Try to spend time with the people around you. Have fun and join in conversations away from the food table, nibble on a little bit of everything instead of getting piles of one or two food items and take the time to savor the flavor of each bite.

If you are the one holding the party, try to impress your guests by making the holiday fare with healthier and nutrient-dense alternatives such as sweet potatoes instead of white potatoes, brown or wild rice instead of white rice or baking the turkey using plant oils and vegetables instead of filling it with a lot of high-calorie bread stuffing. You can even make an alternative to mashed potatoes using cauliflower. Just look up the recipe online! The goal is to focus on foods that are nutrient-rich with fewer calories. This way you can get away with eating a slightly larger portion than usual and still manage to avoid excess weight gain.

So, what will this holiday season mean to you? Lots of gifts, family and friends, or unwanted weight gain? Be realistic, set goals, plan ahead and, most of all, enjoy this time with balance and moderation in what you eat, how you eat and when you eat.

Pentagon, Veterans Affairs expand disability claims test

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden, American Forces Press Service

Defense and Veterans Affairs officials announced another step in their efforts to streamline the process of determining veterans' disability ratings Nov. 16.

Beginning in January, the Disability Evaluation System pilot program will expand to six installations. The new participants are medical facilities at Fort Benning, Ga.; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Lewis, Wash.; Fort Riley, Kan.; and Portsmouth Naval Medical Center, Va.

There are 27 other military facilities already take part in the program.

"The decision to expand the pilot was based upon favorable reviews focusing on the program's ability to meet timeliness, effectiveness, transparency and customer and stakeholder satisfaction," said Nole Koch, deputy undersecretary of defense for wounded warrior care and transition policy, in a statement released by the Defense Department.

The pilot program began in November 2007 within the national capital region and concerns servicemembers who separated from the military under honorable conditions for service-related injuries. It addresses redundancy and inconsistent decisions in medical evaluations in separate disability processes used in the Defense Department and VA.

Outside of the medical facilities using the pilot programs, evaluations for veterans are managed first by Defense Department physicians, then by VA. Through this program, physicians in both departments collaborate on medical findings, speeding the claims and benefit payment processes for disabled veterans.

"The pilot is a test of a new process design eliminating the duplicative, time-consuming, and often confusing elements of the two current disability processes of the departments," the Defense Department statement said. "Key features of the [pilot] include one medical examination and a single-sourced disability rating."

More than 5,400 military members have participated in the pilot program.

"Streamlining our disability claims system and working closely with [the Defense Department] to care for today's generation of heroes are among VA's top priorities," VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki said in the statement. "We will never lose sight of the fact that veterans and military personnel have earned their benefits … by virtue of their service to the nation."

Veterans of the United States armed forces may be eligible for a broad range of programs and services provided by the VA. Eligibility for most VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions, and certain benefits require service during wartime. If you are new to the VA, the Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors booklet will help you get started. Visit the VA Web site at http://www.va.gov for more information.