

Don't Let H1N1 Destroy Your Season

By: Andrew Silver, Sr. Editor SwimNetwork.com

As the H1N1 flu spreads around the world, age group and college athletes are unfortunately coming down with the flu in high numbers. Tulane University, Duke, and Texas Christian University all reported outbreaks among their athletes. Earlier in the year, Swimming Australia cancelled its Grand Prix competition due to a swine flu outbreak. And 12 Zamalek swimmers and their coach were infected at the Cairo Championships this year.

Athletes are more likely to be physically and mentally stressed, making them more susceptible to illness, warns Charlie Thompson, the chairman of the National Athletic Trainer's Association's college and university athletic trainers committee.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2009 H1N1 flu can vary in severity from mild to severe. Certain groups might be more likely to develop a severe illness from H1N1 flu infection, such as pregnant women and persons with chronic medical conditions.

But the flu doesn't have to put a damper on your swimming season, especially if you have a mild case. For instance, Peter Vanderkaay battled H1N1 flu and three weeks later came back to win the 400 meter freestyle at U.S. Nationals.

If you come down with the flu, you may be able to lessen the impact by following a few of these tips compiled from doctors, trainers, and the CDC.

Stay hydrated

A common side effect of the flu is loss of appetite, resulting in less fluid intake and even dehydration. Try drinking small amounts of fluid often and choose drinks that contain electrolytes, such as sports drinks. Michael Castleman, author of *Cold Cures: The Complete Guide to Prevention and Treatment of the Common Cold and Flu*, recommends drinking lots of hot fluids at the first onset of flu symptoms. Hot fluids impair viral replication, plus they have a mild decongestant effect.

Eat small, healthy meals

If your appetite is squelched, try eating small meals more often. And remember that fresh fruit and vegetables contain antioxidant nutrients that bolster the immune system, which in turn helps reduce your risk of other infections.

Sleep it off

Anecdotal evidence among those with swine flu reveals that the virus often comes in waves. You may feel better, but then the fever returns along with other symptoms or possibly a bacterial infection. To give your body its best chance, sleep it off. Doctors recommend sleeping between eight to 10 hours a day to help your body recover and avoid other infections. According to Dr. Maoshing Ni, your immune system function drops by an average of 60 percent after just three nights of poor sleep.

Protect your towels

To avoid spreading germs during flu season, don't share towels. Flu viruses can linger on linens such as your swimming towels. WebMD recommends using a household disinfectant for bathrooms and laundry rooms, following the directions on the product's label. The CDC recommends that when you launder the towels of someone who has the flu, don't hug the laundry before washing it, and set the clothes dryer to the hot setting. And everyone in the house should wash their hands with soap and water (or use an alcohol-based hand gel) immediately after handling dirty laundry.

Don't waste money on miracle cures

Despite what you may read on the Internet, swine flu has no miracle cure. The government's www.flu.gov website lists more than a handful of fraudulent H1N1 flu "treatments" including air systems, body washes,

gels, inhalers, and herbal extracts. Also note that vitamins and other supplements don't boost the immune system or fight the flu, so don't count on vitamins to work recovery magic.

Ease back into your workout

Once you are feeling over the worst, doctors recommend that you start slow. Go for a gentle walk to get some fresh air and open up the lungs again. But don't over-exercise, and gradually return to your normal workout routine. People who get the flu typically run a fever and experience muscle aches for several days. So that's not the time to put your body through an intense workout. Check your temperature to ensure you have no fever before you head back to the pool. Even though the H1N1 flu virus cannot live in a properly chlorinated pool, you could spread germs in the locker room if you go back too soon.

Finally, don't get wrapped up in the hype or panic over H1N1. Seek medical care if you have a severe case. But odds are, you will be feeling better within a week or so.

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