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KICK-OFF THE FALL SEASON RIGHT

For most red-blooded Americans, September means the beginning of Football. Colleges Teams are back at the Gridiron. I'm a big fan at the "Big House" as I Go Blue for Michigan. But whether you are a Wolverine, or around these parts a Bulldog, Yellow Jacket, or other terrifying tenacious mascot, the start of the pigskin season also means that it is time to think about your annual influenza vaccine ... especially for your kids.

Last year at this time I wrote about taking offense or defense. Should you try and tackle the flu after it starts to run, or will you try and block it with a more offensive strategy. I'm a stitch-in-time type of guy, and thus will advise my family and patients to block, block, and block in taking on the flu this season.

THE PRE-SEASON

Before the flu arrives to your stadium your immune system should have been to the necessary pre-season workout. Fortunately, it is getting easier than ever. This year starting as early as August you may receive painless spray-in-the-nose vaccine for preventing the flu. Not

only is the spray easier to abide than "the old shot" but also, believe it or not, it is both more effective and longer lasting. One of those rare cases where "less pain is more gain." Next year the FDA will start recommending the nasal spray even to those less than five years and older than forty-nine years. For those who decide to wait until then, that good old shot is still better than no preparation at all.

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DURING THE SEASON

Besides vaccination, old-fashioned hand washing is the best way to avoid the flu. Children pass the flu among each other because they will often rub their noses, and then proceed to wipe their hands on doorknobs, faucet handles, or their friends. The next kid will then touch the infected object and then touch somewhere on the face, usually the eye or nose. Adults can minimize infection by washing hands carefully before meals or touching the face, especially the eyes. Unless the hands have just been washed, avoid rubbing the eyes or nose. The flu virus lasts for a considerable amount of time on the surface of objects.

If you think a flu virus may have tackled you, call your doctor right away. By the way, the real flu, caused by influenza virus, is a severe respiratory infection that often causes a high fever over 103, pneumonia, extreme fatigue, and general muscle aches. Lesser infections, including gastrointestinal symptoms, are generally another pesky virus, but not influenza, even though your grandmother called it the flu. If you actually think you may have the real flu, your doctor may prescribe an anti-viral if you are able to catch it in the first forty-eight hours.

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