

LOCAL News Desk, 905-526-3420

Naturopaths shun vaccine, say fever is good

There's the scientific way to deal with H1N1.

And then there's the naturopathic way.

A daily dose of good old cod liver oil. Fungi that will keep the flu at bay. Eliminate sugar from your diet. Cook up a big pot of chicken soup.

And whatever you do — say some naturopaths, controversially — don't get the H1N1 vaccination.

"I do not recommend the vaccine," says Laura Margaritis, a Hamilton naturopath who has been swamped with queries by old and new patients leery of getting the flu shot. "This whole thing is a great big hype. It's a very mild infection in almost everyone."

A poll released last weekend by the Globe and Mail and CTV found that 51 per cent of Canadians are not planning to get the H1N1 shot.

Indeed, Margaritis is skeptical that all the illness out there right now is actually the H1N1 virus.

Doctors are not testing every patient for H1N1. So there is no way of knowing, she says, if this is really the swine flu pandemic.

But the government has already spent time and money preparing the vaccine, so it's not going to back off now, she adds.

Before we get any farther into this, let's just make it clear. Most doctors think Margaritis's approach is bunk. Useless at best. Dangerous at worst.

"Vaccine is proven by science," says Dr. Chris Mackie, associate medical officer of health. "And this — the naturopath way — is not."



SUSAN CLAIRMONT

In case you've been living under a rock these past few weeks, Mackie and every other public health official in the country is telling us to get our H1N1 shot.

Yet there are many who are afraid. Or defiant. And those folks are showing up at Margaritis's door in droves.

"I've been treating cases since the end of August," she says. "As well as people who don't want the vaccine or aren't sure that they should get it. Many of those are young mothers getting pressure from their parents and their doctors to get the vaccination."

The flu has been around for thousands of years, she says.

Vaccinations have only been used relatively recently.

The body, if left alone, has the capacity to fight off a flu bug and be stronger and healthier for the trouble.

"Get the illness and go through it and teach the body how to deal with it," she says.

She zones in on fevers in particular. The worse thing you can do if you get the flu, she says, is take Tylenol or some other fever suppressant.



SCOTT GARDNER, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Naturopath Laura Margaritis says skip the vaccine, let body fight off flu.

"Fever is a wonderful thing," she says, "because it means your body is fighting the flu. But today, we're so afraid of fever. Suppressing the fever drives the infection into our lungs."

Margaritis — citing "the media" as her source — says taking

Tylenol led to the death of 13-year-old Evan Frustaglio last weekend. The Mississauga teen collapsed and died a day after visiting a walk-in clinic to have his flu symptoms checked out. The clinic reportedly advised Evan to take Tylenol.

Margaritis claims it was the Tylenol that suppressed his fever and led to his death.

"The hockey player was given Tylenol so he could get out on the ice," she says.

When her own 2-year-old son had H1N1 in September, Margaritis says she allowed the fever to run its course. She let it get up to 106 F "because I'm a naturopath and I know what I'm doing" before "breaking it" with belladonna, a perennial plant used in a homeopathic remedy for fever.

Mackie gives different advice.

Allowing a fever higher than 102 F to go unchecked can cause febrile seizures, particularly in children.

"It's not necessarily dangerous at all," says Mackie, "just really scary"

He recommends knocking the fever down with Tylenol.

Margaritis, and many local health food stores, offer advice to stave off H1N1:

■ Take cod liver oil daily as a source of vitamin A and D.

■ Eat chicken soup.

■ Avoid sugar because it impacts negatively on the immune system.

■ Gargle with sea salt water every hour.

■ Take oscilloccinum, a homeopathic flu remedy derived from duck livers.

■ Take red reishi mushrooms to strengthen the immune system.

Susan Clairmont's commentary appears regularly in The Spectator. sclairmont@thespec.com 905-526-3539