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Plastic Surgery: Head off illness with hygiene

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For The Gazette**

The threat of some nasty disease that will wipe us all out has been around since the first human smoke-signaled in sick for a mammoth hunt. The bubonic plague took out a third of Europe in the Middle Ages. Small pox decimated the native peoples of the Americas. Some of you remember the terror of polio. Fifty million people worldwide, including 700,000 Americans died of a flu virus in 1918. In 1930 there was a scare over parrot fever that caused the neck wringing of thousands of innocent parrots. The modern HIV/AIDS situation revived fears of a complex virus with unstoppable features.

So what to think of the swine flu? There are reports from other countries about infections and the swift demise of the victims. How many movies have you seen where a virus wipes out the whole world except for a brooding hunk male with an appealing dog and a hot single mom with a precocious and adorable kid? Being none of those, I wondered about how bad the swine flu could be. I asked two local infectious disease experts about the behavior of swine flu in this area.

Dr. Cam Saberhagen of the Billings Clinic told me that the swine flu virus is of concern due to its relatively novel genetic makeup. Because it is different from other viruses, we don't recognize it as well immunologically. However, the cases she has seen have been relatively mild, perhaps indicating some genetic evolution. Dr. Fred Kahn of the Respiratory Center has had a similar experience, stating that he recently was in New York City mingling with 10 million other people with no masks on and he wasn't sweating it.

I took the opportunity to ask these experts about other concerns I had, more personal in nature. I am a victim of Chronic Relapsing Spring Fever, which the medical establishment has suppressed and covered up for years. The symptoms are restlessness, frequent sighing, and an unusual interest in boating and fishing magazines. I asked Dr. Saberhagen about this very serious illness - is it a virus, a bacterium, a new super bug?

"It is likely a virus found in persons with an aversion to work," she replied, "and it is also associated with maturational arrest."

I thought Dr. Kahn might be more sympathetic, so I asked him about the chest pain and shortness of breath that occurs with CRSF. "More like old and out of shape than some bug, " was his comment. No wonder my disability insurance carrier won't return my calls.

Rat studies have shown that when populations increase, communicable diseases increase also. Rat studies don't always correlate with human biology, because rats don't shoot, nuke, car bomb, stab or poison each other. But that aside, we must be increasingly aware of our vulnerability to evolving infectious pathogens. If your kids are in sports, be meticulous about clean gear, showering, prompt treatment of wounds and hand washing. There are a lot of nasty resistant staph infections around sports. Any type of wound, body fluid, runny nose, cough, etc., can lead to transmission, so get everyone on board with hygiene.

People like Dr. Saberhagen and Dr. Kahn have convinced me to wash my hands about 50 times a day while at work, the result being my skin is reptilian and my fingernails have dissolved.

Of course you are more likely to be killed by a car, a cigarette, a cheeseburger, a fifth of JD, or an indignant spouse than you are by some exotic disease.

But those are old, tiresome sermon topics. It is the Spring Fever that thrums the strings of your soul; the warm breezes and lilac scents, the ice breaking up on the lake, a snowy mountain against a stark blue sky - a fever not of disease but of a yearning for rebirth, of green shoots and dewy blossoms, of anticipated joy.

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