Super Bowl Fans: Pass the Salsa, Not Your Flu-Laden Saliva

By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — February 4, 2016

Are you hosting or attending a Super Bowl party this Sunday? If so, good luck; you could get the flu. What's worse, if you're 65 and older and watching from the cities whose teams made it to the 50th Big Game (yes, we're talking about you Denver and Charlotte), you might want to watch the game alone; the party could be deadly. Literally.

According to recent findings, cities with teams playing in the Super Bowl see a significant rise in flu cases and flu deaths. The study [2] from Tulane University, published in the American Journal of Health Economics, looked at statistics from 1974 to 2009. The researchers found that having a home team make it to the Super Bowl resulted in roughly an 18-percent increase in flu deaths among those over 65 years old, in comparison to other years and areas with NFL teams not in the Super Bowl.

Talk about a party pooper. But the findings make sense.

The Super Bowl event always takes place during peak flu season. Naturally, when small crowds get together in someone's home, things like drinks, bread, chips, salsa, and other dips are being shared and passed around, thus the potential of spreading germs from one person to another -- and eventually into the lungs of some of the elderly party goers, a population more susceptible to serious complications from influenza.

The influenza virus can be spread through the release of saliva, while coughing, sneezing, or even talking. This is why those attending small gatherings are susceptible; people can easily share saliva through double-dipping and close contact with one another.

And here's more bad news: If you were thinking of getting the flu shot sometime between now and Sunday's action, you won't be immune to catching the virus. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the virus, which is why healthcare officials recommend that you receive the flu shot earlier in the fall, before the flu season kicks off.
Of course, we still urge you to get the flu shot, if you haven't, but it won't help you this Sunday.

So, how else can you steer clear of getting ill while celebrating the most watched event on television in the U.S.? Experts say wash your hands frequently, avoid close contact with party-goers, and avoid sharing food and drinks. And most definitely, don't do a Constanza -- no double-dipping!