DoctorCritical Newsletter November 2026 · Issue 1

An early flu season, a new stroke-prevention drug, and Diabetes Month

by Joe Miller · doctorcritical.com · for members

1. From Joe

Welcome to the first Doctor Critical newsletter. Each month I'll bring you the health news that matters, one condition, one kind of specialist, one number, one first aid skill and one medicine tip, all in plain English. This November the flu showed up early, the FDA approved a new kind of drug to prevent a second stroke, and it's National Diabetes Month. Here is what to know.

2. Health news roundup

As of November 11, 2026.

- **Flu season started early.** The CDC says flu activity at the end of October was higher than usual for this time of year and rising in many states. Almost all of it is the H1N1 strain. The CDC estimates at least 25,000 flu hospitalizations and 1,400 deaths so far this season. If you haven't had your flu shot, the CDC says to get it now; it is for everyone 6 months and older.
- **New drug to prevent a second stroke.** On November 9 the FDA approved Sunharbo (asundexian), the first of a new type of blood thinner called a factor XIa inhibitor. It is for adults who just had a mild to moderate ischemic stroke not caused by atrial fibrillation, or a high-risk mini-stroke (TIA), taken with aspirin-type medicine. In its main trial of about 12,300 people it cut repeat strokes by about a quarter. Bleeding was higher in people over 75 and in the first 90 days. Ask your neurologist if it fits you.
- **Medicare open enrollment ends December 7.** This is the yearly window to switch Medicare Advantage or drug plans. Check that your doctors and medicines are still covered next year. Members: see insurance and Medicare.

3. Seasonal health and safety

Carbon monoxide: heater season

Carbon monoxide (CO) has no color or smell and kills hundreds of Americans a year, most in cold weather. It comes from furnaces, space heaters, fireplaces, generators and cars.

- **Signs:** headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, confusion, like the flu but without a fever, and often everyone in the house (and pets) feeling sick at once.

- **What to do:** get everyone outside into fresh air right away, then call 911.
- **Prevent it:** a CO alarm on every level and near bedrooms, tested monthly; furnace checked yearly; never run a generator, grill or camp stove indoors or in a garage; keep generators at least 20 feet from the house.

Thanksgiving kitchen

- Cook turkey to **165 °F** in the thickest part of the breast, thigh and wing.
- Thaw in the refrigerator, about 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds, never on the counter.
- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours and eat them within 3 to 4 days.

Hunters: falls from tree stands are a leading cause of hunting injuries. Wear a full-body harness and stay connected from the moment you leave the ground.

4. Condition of the month

Influenza (the flu)

	Flu	Common cold
Starts	Suddenly, within hours	Gradually
Fever	Common, often 100 to 104 °F	Rare
Body aches, chills	Common and strong	Mild
Tiredness	Can last 2 to 3 weeks	Mild
Stuffy nose, sneezing	Sometimes	Common
Test	Rapid flu test (nose swab)	Usually none
Treatment	Rest, fluids, fever reducer; antivirals for high-risk or severe cases	Rest, fluids, time

Get care fast for trouble breathing, chest pain, confusion, a high fever that won't come down, or a fever and cough that get better and then come back worse. Babies, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease are at higher risk. See where to go for care.

5. Specialist spotlight

Infectious disease doctors

Infectious disease specialists are internists who trained 2 more years in hard-to-treat infections. Your primary care doctor handles most infections, but you may be sent to one for: an infection that won't clear up, bone or heart-valve infections, HIV or hepatitis C care, germs resistant to antibiotics, unexplained fevers, or illness

after travel abroad. They also run hospital infection-control programs. Training: 4 years of medical school, 3 years of internal medicine, then a 2-year fellowship. See all the specialists.

6. Know your numbers

A1C, for National Diabetes Month

The A1C blood test shows your average blood sugar over about the last 3 months. About 38 million Americans have diabetes, and roughly 1 in 3 adults has prediabetes, most without knowing it.

A1C	Means	What to do
Under 5.7%	Normal	Recheck about every 3 years if at risk
5.7% to 6.4%	Prediabetes	Weight loss, activity; recheck yearly
6.5% or higher	Diabetes (confirmed with a second test)	Treatment plan with your doctor
Under 7%	A common goal for people with diabetes	Your doctor may set a different goal

Ask for an A1C if you are 35 to 70 and overweight, or have a family history, high blood pressure or a history of diabetes in pregnancy. Prediabetes can often be reversed: losing 5 to 7% of your weight and walking 150 minutes a week cut the risk of diabetes by more than half in a major study. See your numbers.

7. First aid skill of the month

Recovery position

For someone who is unconscious but **breathing normally** (after a seizure, a faint that doesn't wake up, or too much alcohol), the recovery position keeps the airway open if they vomit.

1. Call 911.
2. Kneel beside them. Put the arm nearest you out at a right angle.
3. Bring the far arm across the chest and hold the back of that hand against their near cheek.
4. Bend the far knee up, then pull on that knee to roll them toward you onto their side.
5. Tilt the head back slightly to keep the airway open, and keep checking breathing. If they stop breathing normally, roll them onto their back and start CPR.

Don't use it if you suspect a neck or back injury unless they are vomiting. See first aid.

8. Medicine cabinet

Flu medicines, and the hidden acetaminophen

- **Prescription flu antivirals** such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and baloxavir (Xofluza) work best started within 48 hours of the first symptoms. People at high risk should call their doctor as soon as flu symptoms start; the CDC advises treating them even later.
- **Count your acetaminophen.** Many cold and flu combination products (NyQuil, DayQuil, Theraflu, many store brands) contain acetaminophen. Taking one of these plus Tylenol can go over the safe daily limit and damage the liver. Read the "active ingredients" box on every label.
- **Antibiotics don't treat the flu,** a virus. See medications 101.

9. Myth vs. fact

Myth: "The flu shot can give you the flu."

Fact: The flu shot is made from inactivated virus or a single protein, so it cannot cause the flu. Some people get a sore arm, a low fever or aches for a day; that is the immune system responding. It takes about 2 weeks to build protection, so someone who catches flu right after the shot was usually already exposed.

10. Three-question quiz

1. How long after the first flu symptoms do antivirals like Tamiflu work best?
2. What A1C number means prediabetes?
3. What is the first thing to do if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning?

11. Coming next month

December: why heart attacks peak around the holidays, winter safety (falls on ice, frostbite and hypothermia), a year-end roundup of the biggest health changes of 2026, the condition of the month, and a new first aid skill.

Quiz answers

1. Within 48 hours of the first symptoms (high-risk people should still call their doctor even later).
2. 5.7% to 6.4%.
3. Get everyone outside into fresh air, then call 911.

Education, not medical advice. Talk with your own doctor about your health, and call 911 for an emergency.

Sources

Checked November 11, 2026.

- CDC FluView: Week 43, ending October 31, 2026

- AJMC: FDA approves asundexian (Sunharbo)
- Medicare.gov: Open enrollment
- CDC: Carbon monoxide poisoning prevention
- USDA FSIS: Turkey basics
- CDC: Flu symptoms and treatment
- CDC: National diabetes statistics
- NIDDK: Diabetes Prevention Program
- American Red Cross: Recovery position
- FDA: Acetaminophen