On Fighting Swine Flu

To the Editor:

The news article "Researchers Find Large Doses of Vitamin C May Damage Gene Material" (May 20) describes observations by a research team in the Cancer Research Center of the University of British Columbia on the mutagenic action of ascorbic acid, metal ions and oxygen, and quotes one of the investigators as suggesting that people should "avoid massive doses of vitamin C." I have advocated the use of vitamin C in amounts of several grams per day to prevent or treat the common cold and other infectious diseases, including influenza, and I think that it may be of importance in relation to the expected epidemic of swine flu that people not be discouraged from making proper use of this valuable substance. The action of ascorbic acid, metal ions and oxygen on nucleic acids and proteins has been known for several years. It leads to inactivation of viruses and contributes to the control of viral diseases by vitamin C. It has been evident that animals have some mechanism to protect their genetic material against this sort of damage. For example, the mouse shows a low mutation rate, even though it manufactures vitamin C in its own cells at a rate corresponding to an intake of nineteen grams of the vitamin per day for a man. It is likely that human beings have the same protective mechanism, and that there is little danger of harmful effects from ingesting the amounts of vitamin C, several grams per day, that most animals synthesize for themselves.

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