

FLU SHOTS

GOOD NEWS! It's not too late.

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Are you chicken?

Many people tell me they don't want a flu shot. They are afraid it will make them ill. The plain truth is that since the influenza vaccine contains only noninfectious viruses (dead ones), you cannot get flu from the vaccine! The most frequent side effect of vaccination is soreness where the vaccine is injected. This happens less than one-third of the time. When it does occur, it persists no more than two days, and a mild pain medication, such as Tylenol can be taken. Rarely, fever and muscle aches and pains occur, beginning 6-12 hours after the injection and persisting for 1 or 2 days; again, a mild over-the-counter medication like Tylenol can be taken for relief of symptoms. When these symptoms occur, the person usually has not had any prior exposure to the virus. Young children are the most likely to get these symptoms.

Are you allergic to chicken?

Influenza vaccine is prepared by infecting the fluids of chicken embryos with a specific type of influenza virus. Then the virus is inactivated with formaldehyde, concentrated, and purified. Since eggs are used in the preparation, persons with history of severe egg allergy should not receive the vaccine. By "severe egg allergy" we mean people who develop hives, swelling of the lips or tongue, severe difficulty breathing, or fainting after eating eggs. If you can eat even a small amount of eggs, you can take the shot. People who are allergic to Thimerosal also should avoid the shot.

How bad is the Flu?

Typically, Influenza begins with a sudden fever, muscle aches and pains, sore throat and cough. Don't confuse influenza with a common head or chest cold. Unlike colds, the victim usually feels very ill for several days. Either viral or bacterial pneumonia may follow, because the virus weakens the lung's defenses to infection. The complications can be very serious. Many people are admitted to hospitals because of the flu, and at least 10,000 Americans have died of flu-related illness each year. Some years, more than 40,000 died.

Who needs it the most?

"High-risk" persons are those who are most likely to develop complications from the Flu. This includes the following:

- Persons at least 65 years old.
- Residents of nursing homes and other places when persons with chronic medical problems live.
- Adults and children with chronic heart or lung disease – including children with asthma.
- Adults and children with chronic medical problems such as diabetes, kidney problems, or blood diseases.

- Children and teenagers who must take long-term Aspirin (Since they are at risk for developing Reye's Syndrome after flu).

Why another shot each year?

There are many specific types of Influenza viruses. If you have been infected with one of these (or immunized with a Flu shot), you will develop immunity to that virus, but not to other influenza viruses. The infections that occur from year-to-year involve slightly different viruses. That is why you probably will not have immunity to this year's virus. Each year the vaccines are prepared from three specific types of viruses currently circulating in other parts of the world and most likely to arrive here in the United States.

How effective is the shot?

Very. Most children and young adults will be protected against infection by viral strains similar to those in the vaccine. Some elderly persons and those with certain chronic diseases may not develop complete immunity, but they will tend to have a much milder case of the flu – with a much lower chance of complications.

When is the best time to get it?

Large outbreaks of influenza do not occur here before December. They usually peak in January and February, and may continue into Spring. It takes a couple of weeks for your body to manufacture protective antibody, and the protection lasts about six months. Injections can be given as early as September. November is probably the best time to get immunized. Injections can continue to be taken up to and even after influenza is documented in the community. Adults should receive only one injection each season. Children less than 9 years of age need a second dose, one month after the first dose; the second dose should be by December, if possible.

Who can't get the shot?

Persons with severe allergy to eggs or Thimerosal. People who currently have a fever or respiratory or other active infection should delay the injection until they have recovered. Flu shots are not given within three days of a Pertussis (DPT) injection.

If you aren't elderly or high risk?

Anyone who wants to reduce the risk of Influenza should get immunized. Injections are available at many family physicians' and other physician's offices (including our office), as well as the health department.