

Be Well Solutions Health Letter

What Do We Do About the Flu?

September, 2007

As the summer winds down, clients frequently ask about whether they should get a flu shot. While we believe that flu shots are great, we're also amazed at how many people aren't aware of what just what the shot will do for them.

Flu shots protect people from getting a respiratory *virus* called the **influenza virus**. The flu from this virus is very different from a common cold and cannot be treated with antibiotics (like penicillin) because it is a virus.

Flu Symptoms

Influenza usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever
- Headache
- Fatigue (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches



Children may get nausea and vomiting but adults rarely do. Most people who get the flu recover in one to two weeks.

Preventing the Flu

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each year. Vaccines are 70-90% effective in preventing Influenza. There are two types of vaccines:

- ◆ The "flu shot"—an *inactivated* vaccine (containing killed virus). The flu shot is approved for use in people 6 months of age and older, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- ◆ The nasal-spray flu vaccine – a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu. The spray is approved for use in *healthy* people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

About two weeks after vaccination, your body will develop natural protection (antibodies) that defends against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will *not* protect against flu-like illnesses caused by non-influenza viruses and will not protect against bacterial infections like some pneumonias.

THE FLU FACTS

- The "flu" is caused by a virus called the influenza virus
- The virus infects the respiratory system
- This year 5-20% of Americans will get the flu.
- An average of 36,000 people in the U.S. die from the flu annually.
- The best way to avoid the flu is get a vaccination

The Myth of the "Stomach Flu"

Many people use the term "stomach flu" to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. There are many different causes for these symptoms but *not* the influenza virus. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous can sometimes be related to the flu – particularly in children – these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease.

The Flu Season

In our areas, winter is the time for flu. The flu season can range from November until March, and sometimes even past March. During the past 21 years, the month with the heaviest flu activity was February (9 years), followed by January (5), December (4) and March (3). Though it varies, flu season can last as late as May.

When to Get Vaccinated

Since the vaccine takes a couple weeks to become effective, October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but getting vaccinated in December or even later can still be beneficial since most influenza activity occurs in January or later in most years.

Who Should Get the Shot?

The simple answer is "anyone who wants to avoid getting the flu". The U.S. Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all people in the following groups get vaccinated: Children between 6 and 59 months old, their household contacts and out-of-home caregivers, pregnant women in any trimester, persons over 50 years old, people over 5 years of age with any chronic medical condition, caregivers of young children and healthcare workers.

What are the side effects?

- ◆ The most common side effects from the shot are soreness and redness at the injection site.
- ◆ The most common side effects of the nasal-spray are runny nose, nasal congestion and sore throat.

Who shouldn't get the shot?

Some people should not get the vaccine without discussing it with their doctor. These people include those who have had a severe reaction to the shot in the past; those who have severe allergies to eggs, children under six months of age and those who are currently ill. As with all medical treatments, if you have any questions, call your doctor's office.

How the Influenza Virus Is Passed Around

The main way that influenza viruses are spread from person to person is in the respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. (This is called "droplet spread.") Much less frequently, the viruses can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands. Symptoms start one to four days after the virus enters the body. A person can spread the flu about a day or so before he or she develops symptoms. Adults can continue to pass the flu virus to others for another three to seven days after symptoms start. Children can pass the virus for longer than seven days. Some persons can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms-these people are known as "silent carriers" and can still spread the virus to others.



Dr. Golovan Says:

Dr. Golovan, our medical director, is a Board-Certified Internist and the Team Physician for the Cleveland Indians.



Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – particularly fever – without first speaking to your doctor.

Giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome. Children or teenagers with the flu should get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids, and take medicines that contain no aspirin to relieve symptoms.

Tylenol (acetaminophen) is OK for these symptoms.

For More Information..... Call us at 888 WEL-SERV
