No Excuses: Flu vaccination myths addressed

October 12 2012, by Dr. Shailaja Nair

Flu season is here. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year five to 20 percent of Americans get the flu and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized due to flu-related complications. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May. The CDC recommends that people get immunized against influenza as soon as the vaccine is available in the community. This year's flu vaccine protects against the following three viruses: an influenza B virus, an influenza A (H1N1) virus and an influenza A (H3N2) virus.

Here are some common myths and facts about the flu vaccine:

The flu vaccine can cause you to develop flu

The injectable flu vaccine contains only the dead virus, so it absolutely does not cause one to develop flu. The usual side effects from the injection are redness, soreness or swelling at the site of injection, body aches, nausea and sore throat. These are seen soon after the injection and can last for 1-2 days.

The nasal spray contains virus that is inactivated or weakened and does not cause the flu. The usual side effects are runny nose, headaches, sore throat or cough.

If you are young and healthy, you do not need to get the flu vaccine

The CDC recommends that all people six months of age and older get the flu vaccine this season. If you are young and healthy you might recover from the flu without complications, but you still put other people , especially kids, people with chronic diseases, pregnant females and older people at risk of contracting flu and developing serious complications.

The following people should not get flu vaccine without consulting a physician:

- People who have had severe reaction to flu vaccine in the past
- People who are sick with fever at the time of vaccination
- People with severe allergy to chicken eggs
- People with a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome

There is no treatment for flu

Flu is caused by the influenza virus. The flu virus does not respond to antibiotics. If you do get the flu infection, your doctor may prescribe antivirals like Tamiflu or Relenza. These medications do not cure the flu, but they can make the illness milder, reduce the time you are sick by a few days, prevent serious complications and make you less contagious to others. If you are sick, it is helpful to take precautions to prevent spread of the virus by covering your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, washing hands often with soap and water, and staying at home at least 24 hours after fever has subsided.

If you have not gotten the flu vaccine by November, there is no point in getting vaccinated

Flu does not usually hit its peak until February and sometimes as late as

March. It is important to get the vaccine, no matter how late in the season, as flu activity can be seen as late as May. It usually takes two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop and to provide protection against influenza.

If I got the vaccine last year, I do not need to get another one this year

The body's immunity to flu vaccine wanes over time and each year the flu vaccine is constituted differently based on research data that shows which virus strains will be predominant that season. Therefore, it is important to get vaccinated every year.

Provided by Drexel University

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