Influenza (flu) Vaccine

Flu is a viral illness that spreads from person to person by droplets from the nose and throat. It may cause fever, cough, chills, sore throat, headache, and muscle aches. It can lead to pneumonia and death. Flu affects people of all ages. The elderly and weakened (*debilitated*) are the most severely affected.

WHO SHOULD GET THE INFLUENZA VACCINE?

- All people 65 years of age or older.
- All residents of facilities housing people with longstanding (*chronic*) medical conditions.
- Children and adults, including pregnant women, with serious long-term health problems. Examples are: heart disease, lung disease, low red blood cells (*anemia*), kidney disease, metabolic disease, such as diabetes and asthma. It also includes people requiring frequent medical care.
- People who are less able to fight infections because of diseases or immune deficiency. This is also true for people who are taking immune suppressing drugs and those receiving cancer chemotherapy or radiation.
- Children and teenagers 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatment.

PEOPLE OF LESSER RISK WHO SHOULD RECEIVE THE VACCINE:

People having close contact with those who are at high risk. These people include:

- Children who live with people of high risk.
- Health care workers.
- People who work in nursing homes or chronic care facilities.
- People who provide home care to high risk persons, such as visiting nurses and volunteers.

PEOPLE OF LEAST RISK WHO SHOULD RECEIVE THE VACCINE:

- People providing community service.
- People who live or work where large numbers of people are grouped together, such as schools and colleges.
- Women who are more than 6 months pregnant or have given birth during the flu season.
- People going to tropical climates any time of year or to countries south of the equator between April and September.
- Anyone who wants to **reduce** the chance of catching influenza.

WHEN SHOULD YOU GET THE INFLUENZA VACCINE?

Vaccination is necessary every year because the viruses that cause the flu change every year. The vaccine begins to protect you after 1 to 2 weeks and may last up to 1 year. Influenza is most common from December to April, so it is best to get the vaccine in the fall. People 9 years and older need 1 shot each influenza season, while children less than 9 years old may need a second shot after 1 month.

WILL THE VACCINE KEEP YOU FROM GETTING THE INFLUENZA THIS YEAR?

The influenza viruses change frequently, so the vaccine may not protect you against all strains and will not protect you against other viruses causing flu-like symptoms. The vaccine contains viruses that are the same or similar to those thought to affect people for the coming year. Viruses in the vaccine are killed so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.

Other vaccines which may be given at the same visit include pneumococcal vaccine and all childhood vaccines. Because influenza vaccine may cause fever, children 15 months or older who are getting influenza vaccine with a whooping cough (*pertussis*) vaccine, should get a diphtheria-tetanus-acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine.

RISKS FROM INFLUENZA VACCINE?

- There is a risk for serious problems after taking the vaccine. However, the risks from the vaccine are **much smaller** than the risks from getting the disease.
- Children less than 13 years old should be given only split-virus vaccine to reduce chances of side effects.

Split-virus vaccines can also be used by adults.

- If mild or moderate problems occur, they usually start soon after vaccination and generally last up to 1 to 2 days. These consist of soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given, and/or fever, aches, and pains.

TELL YOUR CAREGIVER IF YOU:

- Have an allergy to eggs.
- Have had a serious allergic reaction or problem after getting an influenza vaccination.
- Were ever paralyzed by Guillain-Barré syndrome.
- Are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.
- Currently have a moderate or severe illness.

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A SERIOUS REACTION:

- **Call a caregiver or get the person to a caregiver right away.**
- Write down what happened and the date and time it happened.
- Ask your caregiver or health department to file a Vaccine Adverse Event Report Form (VAERS) or call: (800) 822-7967.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Ask your caregiver. He or she can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.

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