

Facts About Influenza for Adults

WHAT IS INFLUENZA?

Influenza, sometimes called the “flu”, is a highly contagious viral infection of the nose, throat and lungs that ranks as one of the most severe illnesses of the winter season. Influenza is spread easily from person to person primarily when an infected person coughs and sneezes.

HOW IS INFLUENZA PREVENTED?

One dose of vaccine (0.5 cc Intramuscularly into the deltoid muscle of the shoulder) should produce protective levels of antibody against the three strains in 70 – 90% of adults. It takes 1-2 weeks for antibodies to develop.

WHO SHOULD GET INFLUENZA VACCINE?

- Persons with chronic disease (diabetes, asthma, COPD, kidney failure, etc.)
- Persons with lowered immunity (cancer, HIV, advanced age, etc.)
- All health care workers and others in contact with people in high-risk groups.
- Anyone who wishes to reduce his or her chance of catching influenza, particularly those who provide essential community services.

IS THE VACCINE SAFE?

The influenza vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine. It is the best way to protect against flu and its complications, including death. You cannot get influenza from the vaccine. Influenza vaccine is composed of inactivated (killed virus) influenza viruses and is given by injection. The vaccine is manufactured for the fall and winter of 2006-2007 and offers protection against three influenza strains: A/Wisconsin/67/2005 NYMC X-161; A/New Caledonia/20/99 IVR-116; B/Malaysia/2506/2004.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS FROM THE VACCINE

Most people have no side effects from recent influenza vaccines although some complain of a sore arm for a few days. Fever, chills, headaches and muscle aches occur infrequently approximately 6 to 12 hours after vaccination. These symptoms can persist for 1-2 days. As is true of any vaccine or drug, there is a possibility that allergic or other more serious reaction, even death, could occur. In 1976, a certain type of influenza (swine flu) vaccine was associated with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS). Since then, flu vaccines have not been clearly linked to GBS. However, if there is a risk of GBS from current flu vaccines, it would be no more than 1 or 2 cases per million people vaccinated. This is much lower than the risk of severe influenza, which can be prevented by vaccination.

WARNING
SOME PEOPLE SHOULD CHECK WITH A PHYSICIAN BEFORE TAKING
INFLUENZA VACCINE:

- Those who have a fever or who feel ill with something that appears more serious than a cold.
- Those who have received another type of vaccine within 14 days.
- Those who are allergic to eggs.
- Those who are allergic or sensitive to Thimerosal. Some inactivated influenza vaccine contains Thimerosal, a preservative that contains very small amounts of mercury. Some people believe Thimerosal may be related to developmental problems in children. In 2004 the Institute of Medicine published a report concluding that, based on scientific studies, there is no evidence of such a relationship.
- Those with multiple sclerosis, previous attacks of Guillain-Barré Syndrome, or other recurring or persistent neurological illnesses.
- Those who are pregnant.

NOTE: There are no conclusive studies or data on whether or not the risks from influenza or influenza vaccine are the same for pregnant women as for the general population. Because physicians avoid prescribing any drugs or vaccines without clear need during pregnancy, a physician should specifically advise a pregnant woman as to her personal need for the vaccine.

For further information, or if you have any questions, please contact Michele Willis at 240-566-3593.