PREPARING FOR FLU SEASON

As flu season approaches, messages that encourage the flu vaccine are everywhere. Unfortunately, an unhealthy dose of skepticism regarding flu vaccinations often abounds, thanks to common misconceptions about the effectiveness of the vaccine in preventing the flu.

Are You on the Fence About Getting the Flu Vaccine?

Consider these flu vaccine myths and the facts that suggest the flu vaccine is your best bet for reducing your flu symptoms or avoiding the virus altogether this year.

MYTH 1: I’m worried the flu shot will give me the flu.

The fact is that flu shots cannot cause flu illness. That’s because the influenza viruses contained in a flu shot are inactivated (killed), making them incapable of causing infection. Flu vaccine manufacturers kill the viruses during the process of making the vaccine, plus batches of flu vaccine are tested to ensure their safety. In randomized, blinded studies, where some people were given flu shots and others received salt-water shots, the only differences in symptoms were increased soreness in the arm and redness at the injection site among people who got the flu shot. There were no differences in terms of body aches, fever, cough, runny nose or sore throat. (Read about a randomized controlled trial to learn more.)
MYTH 2: The flu is not particularly serious so I don’t really need the vaccine.

Although many people who contract the flu will recover without complications, for some flu is a serious disease. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), estimates of annual flu-associated deaths in the United States range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people during a 30-year period (between 1976 and 2006).

Those at greatest risk are young children, older adults, and people with certain chronic health conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes. But keep in mind, any flu infection can carry a risk of serious complications, hospitalization, or death, even among otherwise healthy children and adults. Therefore, getting vaccinated is a safer choice than risking illness.

MYTH 3: The current vaccine is designed to protect against the same strains as last year’s vaccine, so I don’t need to get it again this year.

Even when the vaccine is not changed from year to year, the CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for just about everyone six months and older. That’s because a person’s immune protection from vaccination declines over time, so an annual vaccination is needed to get the best protection against the flu.

MYTH 4: I’ve read about people who have serious reactions to the flu vaccine so I don’t want to take the risk.

Serious allergic reactions to flu vaccines are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination. While these reactions can be life-threatening, effective treatments are available.

The one exception is individuals who have ever had a severe allergic reaction to eggs, which are often used in creating the vaccine. Make sure your healthcare provider knows about any previous allergic reactions to eggs.

MYTH 5: I know people who got the flu even after getting the vaccine, so I might as well skip it.

There are several reasons why someone might get the flu or a flu-like illness, even after he or she has been vaccinated.

1. Some people can become ill from other respiratory viruses besides flu, such as rhinoviruses, which are associated with the common cold, cause symptoms similar to flu, and also spread and cause illness during the flu season. The flu vaccine only protects against influenza viruses, not other viruses.

2. It is possible to be exposed to influenza viruses, which cause the flu, shortly before getting vaccinated or during the two-week period after vaccination that it takes the body to develop immune protection. This exposure may result in a person becoming ill with flu before protection from the vaccine takes effect.
3. It is possible for an individual to be exposed to an influenza virus that is very different from the viruses the vaccine is designed to protect against. The ability of a flu vaccine to protect a person depends largely on the “match” between the viruses selected to make the vaccine and those spreading and causing illness. Remember the flu vaccine is designed to protect against three or four viruses each season, but there are many influenza viruses that can cause illness.

4. Although the vaccine is effective for most people, it doesn't always provide adequate protection against the flu. This is more likely to occur among people that have weakened immune systems or people age 65 and older. Despite these possibilities, it still makes sense to get the flu vaccine each year.

Prevention Through Vaccination

The upcoming 2013-2014 season’s flu vaccine will protect against the three influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the season. The vaccine consists of two type A strains (H3N2 and H1N1) and one type B strain.

If you choose to get vaccinated or if you offer vaccinations at your worksite, your best bet is to get the vaccination early in the flu season, well before holiday gatherings begin. After all, holiday and family events are prime opportunities for the spread of cold and flu viruses.

Protect Yourself

- An annual flu vaccine is recommended for everyone six months and older.
- Children from six months to eight years may need to have two vaccine doses in the first year of vaccination. This should be discussed with the child's pediatrician or family practice physician.
- The flu vaccine is not recommended for people with a severe allergy to chicken eggs, or people who have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

Please contact your Lockton Health Risk Solutions® team or Account Service team for more information.

Source: www.cdc.gov