

Health Tips

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with

Dr. D


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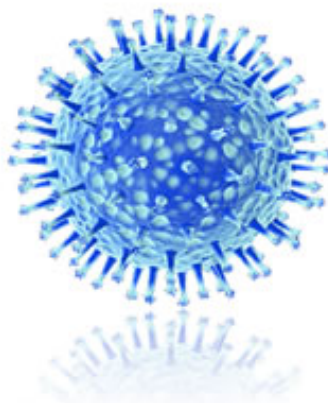


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Health Tip: It's Flu Shot Time----No Excuses!



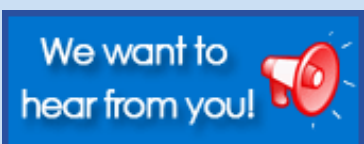
This year's flu vaccine is now available. Although flu season usually peaks after January, it can begin as early as October and last as late as May. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. That's why it's best to get vaccinated early in the fall, before the flu season really gets under way. Every year, I hear a number of reasons for not receiving a flu shot. Here are a few of this year's excuses:

1. **"Since the strains of influenza change each year, the flu shot may not address the virus involved in this year's epidemic".** Each year, the seasonal influenza vaccine contains three influenza virus strains - two influenza A viruses and one influenza B virus. The influenza virus strains in the vaccine are selected each year based on forecasts about what virus strains are most likely to cause illness in the coming season. Granted, last year's vaccine was somewhat off the mark. The formulation failed to protect against the influenza B strain and was only partially effective against the influenza A strain. Even when there is a mismatch between the vaccine and circulating viruses, however, the vaccine may still offer some protection. Antibodies created through vaccination with one strain of influenza viruses will often offer protection against different, but related strains of influenza viruses.

2. **"Shots hurt!"** Many people do not like to receive injections because of the associated discomfort. Others are "needle phobic" --- and panic at the thought of an injection. For these people there is an alternative to an injection. The nasal-spray flu vaccine - a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (FluMist[®]) is approved for use in healthy people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant.



any other topic or question you have!



3. **"I have lived in this area long enough to have developed a 'regional immunity' to the flu here."** Flu viruses circulate around the world and are constantly changing. They can change from one season to the next or they can even change within the course of one flu season. This has two important implications. First, you can get the flu more than once during your lifetime and second, a vaccine made against flu viruses going around last year may not protect against this year's viruses. That is why the flu vaccine is updated to include current viruses every year. Based on preliminary information, it appears that the flu shot and this year's anticipated viruses are a good match.
4. **"I'm afraid of the side effects of the flu shot."** Those who have an allergy to chicken eggs or who have had previous severe reactions to the influenza vaccine should not receive a flu shot. The great majority of others receiving the flu shot, however, will have no untoward effects at all. In the small percentage of those with side effects (soreness at the injection site, low grade fever and aches), symptoms are mild and usually last only 1 to 2 days.
5. **"I can't afford a flu shot"** For those with health insurance, flu shots are usually covered. For those without health insurance, local health departments offer them for a reasonable price. Also, be on the lookout for health fairs or special clinics offering flu shots essentially at cost. In most cases the price of the flu shot is inexpensive compared to the costs associated with having the flu --- doctor's visits, loss of work, medication, etc. Those who have had the flu look at it differently --- "I can't afford to not get a flu shot!"
6. **"I know someone who got a flu shot and then developed the flu."** The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. It is likely that the individual who "got the flu" after receiving the shot had already been exposed to the flu virus or experienced side effects that were misinterpreted as having the flu.



Every year in the United States, 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu, about 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and an average of 36,000 people die from flu. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with chronic health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. Don't let any of these excuses get in the way of receiving your flu shot.

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11719 Hinson Road, Suite 130 Little Rock, Arkansas 72212

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