



District 2 Public Health

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THE REASONS YOU SHOULD GET VACCINATED FOR FLU EVERY YEAR

By now many of you have had your seasonal flu vaccination, and are planning to get the novel H1N1 vaccine when it is available. This is good because there may be several flu viruses circulating at the same time this year and getting both vaccines will help protect you and those around you.

Flu vaccination has been proven to be the best and safest way to prevent illness, and even death that occurs each flu season. Yet every year there are many people who don't take advantage of this "cheap insurance". There are a multitude of excuses that people give for not getting vaccinated, but most of them are simply not credible when you look at the facts. For instance:

"The vaccine gives me the flu". Actually, this is impossible, since the vaccine is made from a piece of a killed virus particle. It cannot give you influenza.

"I never get the flu, so I don't need the vaccine". Hopefully you have never had a head on collision either, but you understand the importance of wearing a seat belt for protection "just in case". Statistically most people will get the flu sooner or later.

"Only old people get the flu". Influenza can infect anyone, but it is often much more severe for the elderly and the very young. By getting vaccinated you may prevent exposing a grandparent or a newborn in your family to influenza; someone who might just die as a result of flu you transmitted. In the United States, there are about 36,000 deaths every year that are related to flu. How well will you sleep at night if you know that you might have caused one of those deaths?

"I can prevent influenza or treat it by taking Echinacea, vitamin C, herbs, etc." While these are not harmful, in normal doses, not a single one has been shown in controlled scientific studies to have any effect on influenza.

"Flu isn't all that bad a disease". Fortunately most people recover from the flu. However, lots of others become very ill, and there are quite a few who don't recover and die. Many of these people have underlying medical conditions, but some were previously healthy and thought it could never happen to them. Don't be one of those.

"I am not at risk for flu". If you breathe you are at risk for flu.

“The vaccine is worse than the disease”. By far the most common side effect is minimal tenderness for a day or so at the site of the injection. Rarely a person may experience a mild fever and some tiredness for up to 24 hours. How does that compare with the possibility of a week or so of high fevers, severe cough, muscle and joint aches, pneumonia, or death?

“I had the vaccine last year, so I shouldn’t need it again”. Because of the unpredictable nature of influenza viruses it is unlikely that the same strains of viruses included in last year’s vaccine will be the same ones circulating this season, making a new “recipe” necessary each year to protect against the current viruses.

“The vaccine costs too much”. The vaccine costs far less than medications, time lost from work, a hospitalization, or a funeral.

“I took the shot once and got the flu anyway”. While this is possible, it is also very rare. Sometimes viruses mutate or the vaccine recipient has an incomplete response to the dose. There are also lots of other “non-flu” viruses that cause upper respiratory illnesses over the winter that can easily be mistaken for “mild flu” – especially when doctors and patients alike use the term “flu” pretty generically. And even if it was really “flu”, it was likely a much milder case than would have occurred without the vaccine.

“I don’t believe in the flu vaccine”. That might be an appropriate excuse if there were no scientific proof that it works – but there is plenty of proof that flu vaccine prevents flu.

“I don’t want to put preservatives in my body”. While multi dose vials of vaccines contain a small amount of preservative to keep the remaining doses from getting contaminated when a dose is withdrawn, the potential exposure to a preservative in this manner is far less than what you get from eating almost any processed food every day.

“The H1N1 vaccine is an untested, experimental drug”. No, the H1N1 vaccine is just another flu vaccine. It is manufactured by the same process and by the same manufacturers as our seasonal vaccine, and it has gone through the same tests for safety and effectiveness.

“The whole influenza vaccine business is a conspiracy between the government and drug manufacturers to make money and force people to do things they’d rather not.” Getting the flu vaccine is completely voluntary. No one can make you get a flu shot. And – the government is paying for the doses of H1N1 vaccine.

“So – is there anyone who should not be vaccinated?” Yes. Anyone with a severe allergy to eggs (the vaccine manufacturing process uses eggs) or anyone who has been diagnosed with Guillain-Barre Syndrome (a very rare, potentially severe nerve and muscle weakness) within 6 weeks of a prior vaccination should not take the vaccine. There are no other medical reasons. For everyone else, the CDC has determined that the benefits attained from vaccination far outweigh any potential for side effects! In other words – we are much safer with the vaccine than without it.