Who Should Get the Flu Vaccine?

In most cases, influenza is a mild illness and most people recover quickly and fully. Consequently, routine vaccination of healthy children and adults is usually not recommended. The elderly as well as individuals of any age with chronic conditions such as heart, lung, or kidney disease, or diabetes, should consider vaccination each year. They are at greater risk of complication or death if they acquire influenza. Annual immunization is also strongly recommended for health care workers and other personnel who have patient contact.

Individuals with multiple sclerosis, neurological illnesses, or who have had previous attacks of Guillain-Barre Syndrome should ***check with a physician before receiving the influenza vaccine.***

Those who are pregnant should note: Ask your physician's advice before receiving the influenza vaccine (or any vaccine or drug). Without clear need, physicians avoid giving any drugs or vaccines during pregnancy.

What Is the Flu? (Influenza)

MCC Health Services
Building 3-165
(585) 292-2018

Adapted from UHS
University of Rochester

What is the Flu?

The flu, also known as influenza, is a respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses and is one of the most frequent winter-time health complaints on college campuses.

Symptoms of typical, uncomplicated flu come on quickly and usually include:

- fever
- chills
- weakness
- aches and pains
- headaches
- dry cough

If you suddenly develop these symptoms at a time when influenza is present in the community, you probably have the flu.

Even during a flu epidemic, however, other types of viral and bacterial illnesses may occur. Seek care from a medical professional if you experience symptoms such as production of large volumes of phlegm, confusion, shortness of breath, wheezing, or a relapse of flu symptoms after 10 to 14 days. These symptoms may indicate an illness other than the flu.

Individuals with diabetes or with chronic heart, lung, or kidney disease should be under the care of a health professional as soon as they develop flu-like symptoms.

Treatment

If you have a typical, uncomplicated case of the flu:

- Rest in bed
- Drink 1-2 quarts of light liquids (water, tea, soda pop, juice, clear soup, etc.) a day. Eat what you feel like eating (low fat, "light" foods are best).
- Take aspirin-free pain relievers such as Tylenol®, Anacin-3 ®, or Ibuprofen® every four to six hours to reduce fever and relieve aches and pains.

Since flu is caused by viruses, antibiotics (which attack bacteria and fungi) will not work and may even be dangerous since they may cause side effects of their own.

The only real cure for flu is time. In uncomplicated flu the fever lasts three to four days and recovery occurs within a week. While most flu symptoms disappear within a week, a dry cough and lack of energy may persist for a couple of weeks. Once the worst symptoms have passed, it is especially important to eat and rest well so that full recovery takes place as quickly as possible. Your activity level should be determined by how you feel.

Aspirin use during flu and chicken pox has been associated with Reye Syndrome, a rare but serious disease. Therefore, the Public Health Service warns that children and teenagers 18 years old and younger should not use aspirin for treating these illnesses. Products containing "acetaminophen" (a non-aspirin product used for relieving aches and pains and for reducing fever) should be substituted for aspirin.

Warning:

Avoid using aspirin or aspirin-containing products.

Complications of the Flu

The risk of complications and death associated with influenza is highest for individuals with diabetes; heart, lung, or kidney disease; and other chronic diseases which lower the body's resistance to infection. Persons over age 65 are also at greater risk of developing complications associated with flu.

The most serious complication associated with flu is pneumonia. Shortness of breath, sharp chest pain on deep breathing, or fever lasting beyond five days are symptoms which may indicate pneumonia. If you experience any of these, you should be examined by a health care professional.

In most cases, taking antibiotics for flu will not prevent the onset of viral or bacterial pneumonia. As mentioned earlier, antibiotics are not an effective treatment or means of preventing viral illnesses. Also, strains of bacteria are now known to exist which are resistant to certain antibiotics.

Preventing the Flu

To help maintain resistance to infections:

- Get adequate rest
- Exercise regularly
- Eat nutritiously
- Wash your hands frequently
- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing
- Discard your tissue after using it once
- Avoid sharing towels, utensils, and cups
- Keep your stress level down
- Avoid kissing

There is no medical evidence that over-the-counter medications, antibiotics, or large doses of Vitamin C are effective in preventing flu (or colds).