

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM OUR PRACTICE

November 9, 2009

What is the flu (influenza)?

The flu is a virus. There are multiple strains of the flu. Since the flu is a virus, antibiotics will not help with the symptoms. Last year, the flu was noted to cause 36,000 deaths due to related complications.

How does the flu spread?

Both seasonal flu and H1N1 are thought to spread from person to person from the coughing and sneezing of people who are sick with the flu. People may also get sick by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose. The flu can spread from 1 day prior to symptoms to 5 to 7 days after the symptoms are present.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme fatigue
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- Sometimes diarrhea

Not all symptoms are present for everyone and although most people have a fever, not all do. The flu usually lasts 5 to 7 days. To the average person, the flu will make you sick for about a week, and then recovery is without complications. To a few, the flu can cause serious complications including ear infections, dehydration, pneumonia, and even death.

What is the difference between the seasonal flu and H1N1?

The H1N1 is a new strain of the flu that has not been seen since 1976. Since young adults and children have not been exposed to H1N1 previously, it is VERY contagious. It has the same symptoms that are noted with the seasonal flu.

What should I do if I think I have the flu?

If you think you have the flu, try not to expose other people. If you can, remain in your home. Cover your cough and sneezes. Avoid sharing utensils. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Keep well hydrated with fluids. Use acetaminophen and ibuprofen to control fevers.

When should I call my Doctor?

Call your doctor right away if you or your child has:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that they do not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve, but then return with fever and cough
- Has other conditions (like heart or lung disease, diabetes, or asthma) and develops flu-like symptoms, including a fever and/or cough
- Rash with a fever

When can I return to work or school?

Stay home until you're fever free WITHOUT acetaminophen or ibuprofen for 24 hours and you have a decreasing cough. A fever is defined as 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

What can I do to prevent the flu?

The best way to prevent against flu is to get your seasonal flu vaccine and your H1N1 vaccine. The seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against H1N1. Cover your nose and mouth with tissue or sneeze and cough into your sleeve. Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand cleansers which are also effective. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Keep surfaces like bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters, and toys clean by wiping with disinfectant cleaner.

Who is at high risk?

There are certain populations who are at high risk and it is especially important to get their vaccine.

- Young children
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart and lung disease, and people 65 years and older
- Health care workers
- People who live with or care for high risk people

If you are high risk what should you do differently?

You should get the seasonal flu vaccine and H1N1 vaccine. If you have symptoms of the flu, you should seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Is the seasonal flu vaccine safe? Is the H1N1 influenza vaccine safe?

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three seasonal viruses that research suggests will be most common. The H1N1 influenza vaccine has a very similar safety profile as the seasonal flu vaccine, which is a very good safety track record.

What are the side effects of the H1N1 vaccine?

The side effects of the H1N1 vaccine are very similar to the seasonal flu vaccine. Side effects of the vaccines are very rare. Mild problems may be experienced including soreness, redness, and swelling to the injection site. Fainting, headache, muscle ache, nausea, and mild fever are rare but can be present and last hours to 1-2 days. Life threatening allergic reactions to vaccines is very rare.

Can I get the flu from getting the vaccine?

The flu shot is a dead (inactivated) virus, so you CANNOT get the flu from the flu shot. Some minor side effects can occur. The nasal spray flu vaccine is a weakened virus causing an immune response to the virus but not causing the flu. It does not cause severe symptoms. Transmission of the vaccine virus to

close contacts has occurred very rarely. Side effects to the nasal flu vaccine include runny nose, wheeze, headache, vomiting, sore throat, muscle aches, and mild fever.

Who can get the vaccine and how often do you need the vaccine?

Everyone is encouraged to get the seasonal flu vaccine unless there is a severe life-threatening allergy to chicken eggs or to any substance in the vaccine.

The H1N1 vaccine should be given to all high risk populations, children over 6 months' old, healthcare professionals, and all immune-compromised people. If available, all people should get the H1N1 vaccine. Everyone under 10 years old will need 2 doses of the H1N1 vaccine, 4 weeks apart.

The nasal vaccine can be given to anyone older than 2 years old who does not have chronic health concerns and does not have someone immune-compromised at home.

The first year a child under age 9 receives the seasonal flu vaccine, they need 2 seasonal flu vaccines 1 month apart.

Can I get the seasonal flu vaccine at the same time as the H1N1 vaccine?

Yes, the seasonal flu vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine can be given together as long as one or both of the vaccines are given in the injectable form. The nasal vaccine needs to be separated by one month from any live vaccines.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov or www.flu.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO

Information obtained from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- 10-23-2009.