



## Your Health and Wellness: Flu Shot



It's that time of year again. "Can I have one?" "Should I get one?" "I don't want one!!" I'm talking about flu shots, of course. As flu season approaches it's time again to brush up on flu facts.

The Influenza viruses are responsible for the illness known as "the flu." The flu is a respiratory illness characterized by the sudden onset of symptoms, including fever, headache, dry cough, muscle aches, stuffy nose, and sore throat. Gastrointestinal symptoms can be present, more often in younger children, but the flu is truly a respiratory illness. Generally people recover from the flu in a matter of a few days to two weeks, but unfortunately, some suffer serious complications which can lead to hospitalization or even death. People who are more likely to suffer complications are those who have an underlying chronic medical illness or who are at the

extremes of age, very young or very old.

Because of its contagious nature and the potential for severe complications, it is important that we do our best to prevent the flu in our facilities this season. There are antiviral medications available that can help shorten the duration of flu illness and prevent the spread of disease, but their effects are limited, they are costly and have the potential for side effects. The most effective means of preventing the flu is vaccination. There are two forms of vaccine on the market. The live attenuated vaccine which comes in the form of a nasal spray, and the inactivated flu vaccine which is an injection. The flu shot is the form most easily available to us at North Medical. The vaccine is generally administered starting in October and can be given any time through the flu season. Usually, a person will develop protective antibodies within two weeks of vaccination.

The vaccine should be offered to any persons over the age of six months who wishes to receive it and should be encouraged in the higher risk groups and those who work in the health care setting. There are only a few reasons that you would not want to give a patient the vaccine--age <6 months, allergy to eggs or any part of the vaccine, history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome soon after a previous flu vaccine, or an acute febrile illness. Remember, the flu shot is made with inactivated virus. **YOU CANNOT CATCH THE FLU FROM THE FLU SHOT!**

You can, however, spread the flu by not being careful. The influenza virus is spread from person to person primarily through droplets--coughing and sneezing, etc. But the virus can also be picked up from contaminated surfaces. Therefore, using good hygiene while in the office and keeping your work surfaces clean are important means of limiting spread of the disease. If you should get sick with the flu, keep in mind that you are likely contagious a day before the illness



starts to five days into the infection. So rest up, drink plenty of fluids and do your best to keep your germs to yourself! More importantly, get vaccinated so we can all stay well.

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