



HOT TOPIC

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THE TRUTH ABOUT FLU SHOTS

It's that time of year again...Flu Season. This is when we find ourselves spending more time indoors and are working and living in close proximity with one another. The flu virus (known as "influenza") is able to thrive in these conditions and spread quickly from person to person. A case of the flu can leave you bedridden for many days (five to ten) and weaken your body's ability to fight off other infections. It can also worsen a current medical condition such as diabetes or heart and lung disease.

One of the best courses of action for helping to prevent the flu is to get a flu shot. This is, of course, in addition to routine and thorough hand washing to prevent the spread of the flu. However, before you get a flu shot or if you are reluctant to, it is important to get the facts about flu shots.

Myth #1

"I don't think the flu shot worked for me as I kept getting a cold."

Truth

The influenza (flu) virus is not the common cold virus. While some of the symptoms may overlap, generally the symptoms are quite different.

SYMPTOM	COLD	INFLUENZA
Fever	Rare	Usual high fever (102 °F/39 °C-104 °F/40 °C) sudden onset, lasts 3-4 days
Headache	Rare	Usual, can be severe
General aches and pains	Sometimes, mild	Usual, often severe
Fatigue and weakness	Sometimes, mild	Usual, severe, may last 2-3 weeks or more
Extreme fatigue	Unusual	Usual early onset, can be severe
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Common
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Common
Chest discomfort, coughing	Sometimes, mild to moderate	Usual, can become severe
Complications	Can lead to sinus congestion or earache	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure, can worsen a current chronic condition, and can be life threatening
Prevention	Frequent hand washing	Annual vaccination and frequent hand washing

Let's **Beat** the Flu

Free Vaccination for all Ontario

Myth #2

"I am healthy so I don't need to get a flu shot."

Truth

It is important for healthy people to get the flu shot because the flu virus changes often and affects everyone differently. You could also be a carrier and pass on a case of the flu to people, such as the elderly, who are at high risk for life-threatening complications.

Myth #3

There are some people who should not get the flu shot.

Truth

There are some cases in which people should not receive the flu shot. They are:

- Babies less than six months old.
- Anyone who has had a serious reaction to a previous flu vaccine.
- Anyone with a serious allergy to eggs.
- Anyone who is ill with a fever at the time of the shot.

Myth #4

The flu vaccine is not very safe and you can have serious side effects from it.

Truth

The vaccine is very safe. Nonetheless, like any other medication there can be side effects. Most people who get the vaccine have either no side effects or they might have soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given. As well, some people may get a fever or muscle aches that start shortly after the vaccination and may last a day or two.

Myth #5

"The flu vaccine isn't really effective so what is the point of getting a flu shot?"

Truth

The flu vaccine is not 100% effective but it has been shown to prevent illness in approximately 70 - 90% of healthy children and adults. Studies have also found that those who still get the flu after having the vaccine usually find they experience very mild symptoms.

Myth #6

"I am afraid that I will get the flu if I get a flu shot."

Truth

The flu shot cannot cause the flu because it is made from "killed" viruses. People who think they have got the flu from receiving the shot are confusing their symptoms with another virus, or it could be a mild side effect from the vaccine. Remember that you are not getting the flu. You are getting a flu shot!

Just the Facts

- Flu shots are especially important for seniors, infants and toddlers 6 to 23 months of age, and for people with underlying medical conditions (e.g. chronic heart or lung disease, diabetes, kidney disease, blood disorders).
- The flu shot should be received annually because the viruses that cause the flu are always changing.
- A flu shot is recommended from October through December, although it is never too late to receive it.
- The maximum protection from the vaccine takes place by about two weeks and lasts for approximately six months.
- There is no such illness as the stomach flu. Stomach upsets can be caused by other viruses.

For more information on the flu shots, contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at 258-2146 x 1433.

See the attached schedule for dates, times, and locations for free flu shot clinics in Windsor-Essex County.

Source: Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion. www.influenza.cpha.ca - October 2004