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WELLNESS WEEKLY

Flu Vaccine:

What you should know about the 2010-2011 Flu Vaccine

As the 2010-2011 flu season approaches, it's once again time for flu vaccination. This year, the CDC advises just about everyone to get the vaccine. The 2010-2011 flu vaccine will protect against three different flu viruses: an H3N2 virus, an influenza B virus and the H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season.

Why get vaccinated?

Influenza ("flu") is a contagious disease. It is caused by the influenza virus, which can be spread by coughing, sneezing, or nasal secretions. Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, symptoms last only a few days. They include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Cough
- Headache
- Muscle aches

Other illnesses can have the same symptoms and are often mistaken for influenza. However, influenza can cause high fever and pneumonia, and make existing medical conditions much worse. Each year thousands of people die from seasonal influenza or require hospitalization. By getting vaccinated you can protect yourself from influenza and may also avoid spreading influenza to others.

Live, attenuated influenza vaccine - LAIV (nasal spray)

There are two types of influenza vaccine:

1. Live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) contains live but attenuated (weakened) influenza virus. It is sprayed into the nostrils.
2. Inactivated (killed) influenza vaccine, or the "flu shot," is given by injection into the muscle.

Influenza viruses are always changing, so annual vaccination is recommended. Each year scientists try to match the viruses in the vaccine to those most likely to cause flu that year. It takes up to 2 weeks for protection to develop after the vaccination and lasts about a year.

Who can receive LAIV?

LAIV is recommended for healthy people 2 through 49 years of age, who are not pregnant and do not have certain health conditions.

People who got the 2009 H1N1 (pandemic) influenza vaccine, or had pandemic flu in 2009, should still get the 2010-2011 seasonal influenza vaccine.

LAIV is not recommended for everyone. The following people should get the inactivated vaccine (flu shot) instead:

- Adults 50 years of age and older or children from 6 through 23 months of age (Children younger than 6 months should not get either influenza vaccine)
- Children younger than 5 years with asthma or one or more episodes of wheezing within the past year
- Pregnant women
- People who have long-term health problems with: Heart disease, lung disease, asthma, kidney or liver disease, metabolic disease such as diabetes, anemia
- Anyone with certain muscle or nerve disorders (such as seizure disorders or cerebral palsy) that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems
- Anyone with a weakened immune system

When should I receive influenza vaccine?

Getting the vaccine as soon as it is available will provide protection if the flu season comes early. Influenza can occur any time, but most influenza occurs from November through May. In recent seasons, most infections have occurred in January and February. Getting vaccinated in December, or even later, is still beneficial.

What if there is a severe reaction?

- Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away if there are unusual conditions, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.
- Tell the doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.