

Birmingham & District Tinnitus Group

This is printed as part of a series of occasional papers produced by BIRMINGHAM & DISTRICT TINNITUS GROUP presenting a variety of points to offer information and support for our members

Flu

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We welcome any measures which can be taken to avoid the exacerbation of tinnitus and so we remind members annually of the NHS provision for flu protection.

Every autumn a national campaign is run, offering influenza (flu) vaccinations to protect people who are at risk of serious illness should they catch flu. This includes everyone who is 65 years of age or older. The vaccinations are given by GPs and nurses, usually in doctors' surgeries.

About Influenza (FLU) - A Department of Health Leaflet

What is flu?

Influenza (flu) is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus - the influenza virus. It tends to start suddenly with symptoms such as fever, chills, headache, aching muscles and feeling generally unwell, together with a cough or sore throat. It is usually much more than a simple head cold, although people sometimes call a heavy cold "flu". Colds are more likely to start gradually with a sore throat and stuffy or runny nose and to be less severe.

Flu is spread by coughs and sneezes from people who are already infected with the virus and it can spread very rapidly.

Influenza is around every winter. Most of it occurs within a few weeks, so that a lot of people are ill at the same time. The viruses are always changing, so this winter's flu will be slightly different from last winter's. If it is a very bad year, this may amount to what is called an epidemic. How much flu there will be each year is difficult to predict.

How serious is flu ?

For most people, flu is a nasty experience. For some people flu can lead to more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia which may require treatment in hospital. Sadly, every winter a lot of mainly older people die from influenza.

Flu Vaccination - Who should be vaccinated ?

You should ask about having a flu vaccination :

- if you are 65 years old or over
- Whatever your age, if you have :
 - a chronic heart or chest complaint, including asthma
 - chronic kidney disease
 - diabetes
 - lowered immunity due to a disease or treatment such as steroid medication or cancer treatment
 - any other serious medical condition - check with your doctor if you are unsure
- if you live in an old people's home or nursing home.

Why shouldn't everyone have a flu vaccination ?

Healthy people don't need to be vaccinated - flu is a nuisance but not usually serious for them, and the occasional bout of flu gives better long term protection than a flu vaccination.

How is the vaccine made ?

Flu vaccines contain the ingredients from three different strains of flu virus. The viruses are grown on eggs, then killed and purified before being made into a vaccine.

How does the vaccine work ?

About a week to ten days after the vaccine is injected, your body makes antibodies to the vaccine viruses. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with. This protection lasts for about a year

How effective is the vaccine ?

Flu vaccinations are pretty effective. Most people who have been vaccinated will not get the kinds of flu from which the vaccine was made (we have been getting better at predicting which strains need to be in the vaccine each year). If you do catch flu, it is likely to be milder than if you had not been vaccinated.

Flu vaccinations protect against flu. They will not protect you against the many other viruses that are around every winter. Some of these cause similar symptoms to flu, and are often called "flu". But flu is generally more serious than these other infections, so it still makes sense to have a flu vaccination.

Can influenza vaccine cause flu ?

No. The vaccine does not contain any live virus, so it cannot cause flu.

Does the vaccine have side effects ?

Flu vaccinations are very safe. You may get some soreness where the vaccine was injected. Less often, people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days after being vaccinated. Other reactions are very rare indeed.

Is there anyone who should not be vaccinated ?

You should not be vaccinated if you have a serious allergy to hen's eggs. Vaccination is generally not advised if you are pregnant. If in doubt, ask your doctor.

When is the best time to be vaccinated ?

The best time to be vaccinated is between late September and early November, ready for the winter. You should not wait until there is a flu epidemic.

How do I go about getting immunised ?

If you think you need a flu vaccination, check with your doctor or the practice nurse - or if a nurse visits you regularly, you can ask them. You can phone NHS DIRECT on 0845 46 47 or visit its website on www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk for more information. Alternatively, ask your local pharmacist. Most doctors organise special vaccination sessions in the autumn. Make sure you are able to attend one.

A companion leaflet, "What should I do about flu?" is free from : DoH, PO Box 77, London SE1 6XH

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