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Western Montana Clinic

FLU SHOTS (INFLUENZA VACCINE)



WHAT ARE FLU SHOTS?

When you get a flu shot you are injected in the arm with the influenza vaccine.

The vaccine helps protect adults and children from getting influenza (flu).

The influenza virus is always present somewhere in the world. In the United States flu outbreaks tend to occur each year between November and March.

Influenza causes a coldlike upper respiratory infection. Unlike most colds, however, the flu often causes fever, muscle aches, and dizziness. It can also lead to more serious infections, such as pneumonia. Complications from flu cause up to 40,000 deaths per year in the U.S. These deaths usually occur in the elderly and in people with chronic health problems, such as heart disease and severe asthma.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

The formula for the flu vaccine is changed every year according to the recommendations of scientists from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). They predict which strains of flu virus are most likely to appear the next winter.

The virus in the flu vaccine has been inactivated, or "killed." This means you cannot catch the flu from getting the shot. Getting the shot introduces part of the flu virus to your immune system. Your body then reacts by making protective antibodies against the virus.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THEY?

Flu shots appear to be about 70% effective in preventing the flu. Even if you do get the flu, the vaccine helps protect against severe and possibly life-threatening infection. For this reason it is said that the flu shot protects against death from the flu more than from flu itself.

The flu vaccine becomes effective 2 to 4 weeks after you get the shot. It is best to get the flu shot in October of each year. Try to get it no later than November, if possible.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Eggs are used in the production of the flu vaccine. If you are allergic to eggs, you may have a severe allergic reaction to the flu shot. **The flu shot should not be taken by anyone who has a history of severe egg allergy.**

Some manufacturers also recommend not getting a flu shot if you have an allergy to thimerosal. Thimerosal is a preservative used in contact lens solutions and the flu vaccine. It is in other vaccines as well.

For people who do not have egg or thimerosal allergies, the flu vaccine has infrequent, minor side effects. The most common reaction is some soreness at the site of the shot. A few people develop fever or muscle aches within a few hours of the injection. These symptoms may last 1 to 2 days.

There have been no reports of flu shot complications affecting the nervous system since the 1976-1977 swine flu epidemic.

WHO SHOULD GET A FLU SHOT?

Several groups of people should receive the flu shot every year:

- people over the age of 50
- people whose immune systems may be impaired, such as by HIV, cancer, or an organ transplant
- people with chronic medical problems, such as asthma, heart disease, emphysema, and diabetes
- people working in health care
- school teachers and other community workers with close, daily contact with the public.

Flu shots can be helpful for anyone who is not severely allergic to eggs. However, when there is a shortage of flu vaccine, the recommendations for who should get a shot may change, based on the severity of the shortage.

INFLUENZA

WHAT IS INFLUENZA?

Influenza (also called flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea, and bronchi (air passages). Outbreaks of flu occur almost every year, usually in winter.

Flu viruses cause more severe symptoms and can cause more severe medical problems than cold viruses. The elderly, people whose immune systems are impaired, and people with chronic medical problems are particularly at risk for more severe flu symptoms or complications.

HOW DOES IT OCCUR?

The flu virus is almost always spread from person to person by droplets that are coughed or sneezed into the air. It can also be spread by the hands of an infected person who has touched their mouth or nose.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Influenza tends to start suddenly. You may feel fine one hour and have a high fever the next. The usual symptoms are:

- chills and fever (often 101 to 103°F, or 38 to 40°C)
- sweating
- muscle aches
- headache.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Influenza can usually be diagnosed from your symptoms. Your health care provider may examine you to rule out other types of infection, such as strep throat and sinusitis.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Often you can diagnose and treat yourself. However, you should always see your health care provider if:

- You are over the age of 65.
- You have heart disease, asthma, chronic bronchitis, kidney disease, or diabetes.
- Your immune system does not work normally (for example, because you are taking steroids for another medical problem).
- Your symptoms become more severe, or you have a painful cough and are coughing up phlegm. This may indicate you have pneumonia or bronchitis.

Take care of your self at home:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink a lot of liquids. Water, juice, and noncaffeinated drinks are best. Especially when you have a high fever, your body needs much more liquid than when you are healthy. Having enough fluids also helps the mucus in

your sinuses and lungs to stay thin and easy to clear from your body. When the mucus is thin, it is less likely to cause a sinus infection or bronchitis.

- Consider taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen to relieve headaches and muscle aches and to lower a fever. (Do NOT use aspirin if you have the flu.) Some health care providers feel that because fever is part of the immune system's reaction to infection, it is better to let a fever run its course than to try to lower it. Letting the fever run its course, however, can be dangerous in children and the elderly. Also, most healthy adults feel much better if the fever is decreased even 1 or 2 degrees.
- If your nose or sinuses become congested, a decongestant medicine may help you feel better and may possibly help prevent ear or sinus infections.
- Take cough medicine to help control your cough.
- Antihistamine medicine can be helpful if a runny nose is making it hard for you to sleep. However, antihistamine has a very drying effect and may cause the mucus in your nose, throat, and lungs to become thick and dry.

These are medicines your health care provider can prescribe that can make flu symptoms less severe. They may also help the symptoms not last as long. Examples of these drugs are amantadine (Symadine or Symmetrel), rimantadine (Flumadine), zanamivir (Relenza), and oseltamivir (Tamiflu). These flu medicines are available as tablets or nasal sprays. They must be started within the first 48 hours of illness to be effective. Usually they need to be taken only a few days. A common side effect of the tablets is lightheadedness or dizziness.

HOW LONG WILL THE EFFECTS LAST?

Flu symptoms usually last 3 to 7 days. They often start improving gradually after the first 2 days or so. Infection with the flu virus often leads to other infections, such as ear, sinus, and bronchial infections. Pneumonia can also occur as a result of the flu. It can be caused by the flu virus itself or by bacteria invading lung tissues that have been damaged by the virus. Pneumonia is a common cause of death in people over the age of 65 and often occurs during and after flu outbreaks.

An unusual complication of flu is Reye's syndrome, which usually occurs in children and adolescents and rarely occurs in adults. Reye's syndrome is not well understood but it involves failure of the liver and brain swelling, which together can lead to coma and sometimes death. A link has been shown between the use of aspirin during influenza illness and the development of Reye's syndrome.



STOMACH FLU (Viral Gastroenteritis)

WHAT IS STOMACH FLU?

Stomach flu is a viral infection that affects the stomach and small intestine. It is also called viral gastroenteritis. The illness is usually brief, lasting 1 to 3 days.

HOW DOES IT OCCUR?

Many different viruses can cause gastroenteritis, including rotaviruses, adenoviruses, and the Norwalk virus. Gastroenteritis is caused by swallowing one of these viruses. The body fluids of infected people contain the virus, sometimes even before their symptoms begin. The virus can be spread by direct contact with an infected person (for example, kissing or shaking hands) or by sharing food, drink, or eating utensils.

The virus enters the stomach and intestine and inflames the lining of these organs. As a result, the stomach and intestines are temporarily unable to perform their usual functions. The virus can also cause food to move more rapidly through your gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Some bacteria, parasites, medicines, or other medical conditions can cause infections that have symptoms similar to those of stomach flu. If your symptoms are unusually severe or last longer than a few days, your health care provider can determine if the diarrhea is caused by a virus or by something else.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

When you have stomach flu, you may have one or more of the following symptoms:

Nausea - vomiting - stomach cramps - diarrhea - mild fever - fatigue - chills - loss of appetite - muscle aches.

The illness may develop over a period of hours, or it may suddenly start with stomach cramps, vomiting, or diarrhea.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms. He or she may examine you and order lab tests to rule out more serious illnesses, such as appendicitis, and to detect complications, such as dehydration.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

The most important thing to do is to rest the stomach and intestines. You can do this by first eating nothing solid and drinking only clear liquids. A little later you can eat soft bland foods that are easy to digest.

If you have been vomiting a lot, it is best to have only small, frequent sips of liquids. Drinking too much at

once, even an ounce or two, may cause more vomiting. Your choice of liquids is important. If water is the only liquid you can drink without vomiting, that is okay. However, if you have been vomiting often for a long time, you must replace the minerals, sodium and potassium, that are lost when you vomit. Ask your health care provider what sport drinks or other commercial electrolyte replacement drinks could help you replace these minerals.

Other clear liquids you can drink are weak tea and apple juice. You may also drink soft drinks without caffeine (such as 7-UP) after letting them go flat (lose their carbonation). Chilling the liquids may help you keep them down. Avoid liquids that are acidic (such as orange juice) or caffeinated (such as coffee) or have a lot of carbonation. Do not drink milk until you no longer have diarrhea.

You may start eating soft bland foods when you have not vomited for several hours and are able to drink clear liquids without further upset. Soda crackers, toast, plain noodles, applesauce, and bananas are good first choices. Avoid foods that are acidic, spicy, fatty, or fibrous (meats, coarse grains, vegetables) and dairy products.

You may start eating these foods again in 3 days or so, when all signs of illness have passed. Sometimes treatment includes prescription medicine to prevent nausea and vomiting or diarrhea. Nonprescription medicine is available for the treatment of diarrhea and can be very effective. If you use it, make sure you use only the dose recommended on the package. If you have chronic health problems, always check with your health care provider before you use any medicine for diarrhea. If you have been vomiting for more than a day or have had diarrhea for over 3 days, call your health care provider. You may need to have an exam to rule out more serious problems and to check for dehydration. You may also need to have lab tests to determine whether bacteria or germs such as giardia are causing your illness.

Dehydration is a potentially serious complication of stomach flu. It can occur if your body loses too much fluid because you keep vomiting or having diarrhea. If you are severely dehydrated, you may need to be given fluids intravenously (IV). In children and the elderly, dehydration can quickly become life threatening.

HOW LONG DO THE EFFECTS LAST?

Stomach flu rarely lasts longer than 1 to 3 days. However, it may be 1 to 2 weeks before your bowel habits return completely to normal.

HOW CAN I TAKE CARE OF MYSELF?

Rest your stomach and intestines by following the guidelines above, but make sure you prevent dehydration by drinking enough liquids. Drink just small amounts often during the vomiting phase of your illness.

GET YOUR FLU SHOT

Beginning — October 22nd

- **\$28 AT TIME OF SERVICE**
- **No insurance billing**
- **Medicare will cover & will be billed**

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

**Western Montana Clinic
Broadway Building
(1st Floor Conference Center #3)
500 West Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802**

CALL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER IF:

- Your symptoms are getting worse .
- You continue to have severe symptoms for more than 2 or 3 days, or you are just not getting better after a few days.
- You develop symptoms that are not usually caused by stomach flu, such as blood in your vomit, bloody diarrhea, or severe abdominal pain.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP PREVENT STOMACH FLU?



The single, most helpful way to prevent the spread of stomach flu is frequent, thorough hand washing. Also, avoid contact with the body fluids of an infected person, including saliva. Don't share food with someone who has stomach flu.

HALLOWEEN FUN SAFETY TIPS

Many parents caution their children about sharp objects stuck in apples, getting hit by a car, and only going to certain houses. This year share these Halloween Safety Tips with your little goblins:

- **HAND INJURIES:** Make pumpkin carving safer with inexpensive carving kits that provide tiny saws, rather than knives. Don't forget you can also draw faces or designs on the pumpkins and leave the carving to adults.
- **ALLERGIC REACTIONS:** Allergic reactions to face paint are not all that uncommon. Test paint on an arm a few days before Halloween to see if there is a reaction. Always remove the paint before bed time.
- **COSTUME DANGERS:** Beware of tripping hazards such as large shoes, capes or long skirts, and ill-fitting masks. Always check to make sure a costume's label says it is made of a flame-resistant material. Add inexpensive reflective tape to help drivers see children at night.



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Western Montana Clinic

Phone: 406.721.5600

Fax: 406.721.3907

wmclinic@wmclinic.com