

Adventist Healthcare: Health Tip of the Week

The Importance of a Flu Shot

The influenza virus (flu) attacks an average of 10 percent of the population. Each year, 200,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die from the flu.

Influenza Facts

- The flu season is from November to April. Peak flu season is late December to early March. The 2003-04 influenza season in the U.S. began earlier than most seasons and was judged by the CDC to be more severe than the previous four flu seasons in the country.
- The site of invasion from a flu virus is the respiratory tract. Most experts believe that flu epidemics begin in younger children and then spread to adults.
- Pneumonia is the most common complication of the flu. Flu/pneumonia is the sixth leading cause of death among Americans.

Vaccine Facts

- If the match between the vaccine and circulating strains is close, flu vaccine prevents influenza in about 70-90 percent of healthy persons younger than age 65.
- According to a recent study, 18-64 year-old employees who were given the influenza vaccine had a 43 percent reduction in workdays lost.

When to Get Vaccinated

- The best tool for preventing the flu is to get a flu shot in early October to mid-November. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop in the body.

Who Should Get Vaccinated

- All children 6-23 months of age and their close contacts
- Adults who provide community services such as police, fire and EMS
- It is safe for breastfeeding women to get vaccinated
- Adults age 50 or older
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Adults and children (6 months or older) who have chronic heart/lung conditions
- Students in dormitories or other residential facilities
- Adults and children who travel frequently
- Doctors, nurses and employees of nursing homes, hospitals, etc.
- Adults and children in contact with high-risk groups

It is important to talk with your doctor before getting a flu shot if you have ever had a severe, allergic reaction to eggs or to a previous flu shot. Also, if you have a history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome.

Sources: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics, National Center for Infectious Diseases and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.