

INFORMATION ON INFLUENZA ('flu') VACCINATION

Influenza is a severe illness with the sudden onset of fever, muscle aches and pains, headache, sore throat and cough - sufferers are usually in bed unwell for days, and if they have other medical problems with the heart or lungs it can be quite dangerous.

Influenza should not be confused with the common cold, in which you get a runny or blocked nose, sore throat and perhaps a cough without the more severe features of the true 'flu' illness.

Influenza is caused by a virus, and antibiotics are of no help in treating it. There are some specific anti-viral medicines but these are expensive and need to be taken very early to get any benefit. The best option is prevention by the vaccine against it - the FLU VACCINE.

Following on from the 2009 swine flu pandemic this year there are 2 flu vaccines available:

1. A free flu vaccine available to everyone from 6 months of age that will just protect against swine flu
2. The seasonal flu vaccine that will protect against swine flu and 2 types of influenza type A. This vaccine costs \$25 but is free for those aged 65 years and over, for pregnant women and for anyone aged from 6 months with a condition predisposing to severe influenza. You may still get a milder version of the flu from one of the other strains going around.

The protection from the vaccine is very good but not 100% perfect.

It is safe in pregnant women and indeed is now recommended if you will more than 18 weeks pregnant in the flu season

If you have a fever of greater than 38.5 degrees we suggest deferring having the vaccine until you are well.

The only people who should definitely NOT have the vaccine are those with a true serious egg allergy, or an allergy to any of the components in the vaccine.

Most people do not have any side effects other than a mild degree of soreness at the injection site. Uncommonly, fever and muscle aches may develop within a couple of hours - these may last one to two days but settle on their own. Rarely an acute allergic reaction with hives, features of asthma and swelling may occur and require medical attention. The most rare side effect is that of a fairly sudden and often severe onset of weakness and nerve problems - this is called Guillain Barre Syndrome, and is thought to occur in about one of every 1 - 2 million vaccinations.

Contrary to some popular opinion, the flu vaccine *cannot* actually give you the flu.

We suggest the vaccine be given in Autumn to give good protection in time for the annual flu season- influenza occurs most in late winter.

It is given by an injection into the upper arm and we recommend that you wait in the clinic for 15 minutes afterwards in case of any severe reaction.