

---

---

# THE "INFO"-HALER



TAKE IN THE INFORMATION

An easy to understand, informative newsletter for our patients of all ages from the  
*Allergy & Asthma Associates of Michigan, P.C.*

---

## SHOULD I GET A FLU SHOT?

The word "flu" is an abbreviated term for "influenza". Influenza is an infectious disease caused by the influenza virus. It is primarily a respiratory disease. The virus is inhaled and comes in contact with mucosa cells of the upper air passages (nasal, tracheal, and bronchial cells). It penetrates these cells and reproduces within them. In time, new influenza viruses are released from the infected cells and they, in turn, infect other cells along the respiratory tract. Influenza may spread deep within the lungs. The virus may also be carried away in exhaled air (especially during coughing and sneezing) to infect other people. Influenza spreads rapidly and has a very high attack rate. You may develop flu symptoms within one to four days after contact with the virus, and you may spread the virus to others for three to four days after symptoms develop. The symptoms are always abrupt in onset and exhausting to the patient. Symptoms of influenza include chills, fever, headache, muscle aches, weakness, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, sore throat, and chest tightness. Most people recover within one week, but don't feel quite themselves again for three to four weeks. Often the patient's resistance may be so impaired that secondary infections such as bacterial pneumonia, sinusitis, and bronchitis develop following influenza.

Influenza tends to occur in epidemics. Each outbreak is caused by a virus slightly different from the earlier ones. Scientists often name the different strains (types) of the virus after the location where the strain was first identified. There are three main types of influenza virus: type A, type B, and type C. Types B and C affect only human beings. Type A can infect humans and certain animals (like swine) as well. The animals may then carry and transmit the infection. Epidemics may be caused by either type A or type B or both. There is no specific treatment for influenza B, except to treat the individual symptoms. For influenza A, treatment is possible if medications are started early enough.

Influenza outbreaks occur most frequently in the winter months, though they are not caused by cold weather. In the United States, influenza generally peaks between December and March. The outbreaks are thought to be related to the crowding of people indoors during cold weather. In such crowded situations, the virus has a greater chance than usual to spread.

Influenza is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. In 1918-19, one of the worst global epidemics of influenza occurred killing twenty million people including more than 500,000 Americans. In 1957-58, the Asian flu caused a worldwide epidemic, as did the Hong Kong flu in 1968-69.

Health authorities try to prevent the spread of influenza by vaccination. Vaccines provide immunity by causing the body to manufacture disease fighting substances called antibodies. These antibodies protect the person if he or she is exposed to the actual disease causing organisms. The influenza vaccine is powerful enough to trigger antibody production, but does not actually cause the disease since the vaccine is prepared from a "killed" virus. The vaccine begins to provide immunity about two weeks after it is administered. Ideally the influenza vaccine should be administered between mid-September and mid-December. The vaccine is safe and dependable, and there is no danger of contracting influenza from it. It provides immunity in 70-90% of all healthy people vaccinated. The influenza virus changes or mutates easily, so the vaccine is only good for one season. Generally the last flu strain to emerge at the end of a season is the strain that dominates the next season. Immunity generally lasts for the entire season. It is important to be vaccinated each year.

The influenza vaccine is prepared in embryonated chicken eggs. If a person is allergic to eggs, they should not receive the vaccine without allergy skin testing first. The influenza virus vaccine may cause mild side effects, though this is extremely infrequent. The side effects would be fever or soreness/redness at the injection site beginning six to twelve hours after the injection, and lasting no more than one to two days.

Influenza immunizations are offered here beginning in September of each year. We believe all our allergy and asthma patients and their families should be immunized. Allergy patients have a unique system in place to develop a more intense inflammatory response than most people when exposed to the virus. Asthma patients will find that viral infections are among the most potent of all asthma triggers. If everyone gets immunized, it will help to reduce the number of potentially infectious people, and hopefully be able to hold the severity of an epidemic in check. Decreasing the number of people who contract influenza, decreases the number of people at risk for influenza complications. It is recommended that everyone who wishes to reduce their chance of acquiring influenza infection be immunized. So, when you ask, "Should I get a flu shot?" We answer, "You bet!"

Stephanie Cook R.N., B.S.N.  
Allergy & Asthma Assoc. of Mi. P.C.