



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Influenza Vaccination for Healthcare Personnel

Does the flu shot cause the flu?

Flu vaccines do not cause the flu. The flu shot is an inactivated vaccine containing killed virus. This means that it cannot cause infection. Manufacturers kill the viruses used in the flu shot during the process of making the vaccine. Batches of flu vaccines are tested to ensure they are safe.

Is there an alternative to getting the flu shot? What are the possible side effects of the alternative?

Vaccination with the nasal-spray flu vaccine is only available for healthy people from ages 2 through 49, not pregnant, and do not have egg allergies. The nasal-spray vaccine is a live attenuated version of the virus. Although the nasal spray flu vaccine contains live viruses unlike the flu shot, the viruses are attenuated and cannot cause flu illness. The side effects are runny nose or nasal congestion, cough, chills, tiredness/weakness, sore throat and headache. The side effects are mild and are short lived compared to symptoms of influenza infection.

Healthcare providers should not get the nasal spray flu vaccine if they are providing medical care for patients who require special environments in the hospital (such as in a bone marrow transplant unit). These healthcare providers should receive the shot rather than the nasal spray.

Are flu vaccines safe?

Flu vaccine has an excellent safety profile. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) monitor vaccine safety to quickly identify adverse health events following immunization. Almost all people who get the influenza vaccine have no serious problems as a result. Serious problems from the flu vaccine, such as severe allergic reactions, are very rare, and can usually be avoided by careful history screening prior to vaccination. People who have experienced previous problems with a vaccination should consult with their healthcare provider before getting a flu shot.

What are the most common side effects of the flu vaccine?

The flu shot: The most common side effects that a person may experience are soreness, redness, or swelling at the site of injection. These symptoms are usually mild and last less than two days. The soreness is caused by the person's immune system creating antibodies to the killed viruses in the vaccine. Antibodies allow the body to fight against the flu. Other symptoms including fever, chills, malaise, and muscle aches are rarely reported (less than 1%) in persons receiving the flu shot.

The nasal spray: In adults, the side effects include runny nose, headache, sore throat, and cough.

How serious is influenza?

Influenza is the sixth leading cause of death among adults in the United States. Influenza causes worldwide epidemics yearly, accounting for 250,000-500,000 deaths. Research has shown that pre-exposure immunization is the most efficient method to prevent these annual outbreaks, related illness, and deaths.

For more information, contact the Immunization Program:

805-981-5211 or immunization.program@ventura.org – on <http://vchca.org/public-health/for-health-care-providers>