

Welcome to Daleswood Health Talks

This talk is about Flu and the flu vaccination.

It's 100 years since the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic which affected 1/2 the world's population and killed about 40 million people. The flu season runs from October to April and is worst between December and February.

About 600 people in the UK die each year from flu but this can rise to over 10,000 people as it did in 2013/14. Last year over 60 children died from flu.

Flu is caused by a virus which can be very dangerous for some groups of people.

Flu symptoms are far worse and last longer than a common cold. Flu starts with a sudden high temperature, headache, general body pains, tiredness, sore throat, cough, running nose, sneezing and sometimes tummy upset. These can result in a pneumonia, ear infection, meningitis or sepsis and these can happen in anyone but are more common in at risk groups.

The flu virus can change rapidly over time making it very difficult to predict which types will be circulating at any one time or area.

As with almost all viruses we have very little to treat flu making vaccination the only practical and effective means of managing the disease.

Every February the World Health Organisation makes a prediction for which types of flu will be circulating so that vaccinations can be made in time for the flu season.

The flu virus is present in droplets when we cough or sneeze and surviving outside the body for about a day. This makes it very easy to spread either when airborne or when it settles on hard surfaces such as hand-rails, door handles, computer keyboards, food and drinks. It is thought that about 1 in 3 people infected will not show any signs but can still pass it on to others and those that do have symptoms can spread it for about 1 to 2 weeks. Unfortunately children are more vulnerable to flu and are more likely to pass it on.

People that work in childcare or teaching, shops, restaurants, public transport, shared offices or that travel a lot, stand a much higher chance of being exposed to flu.

At risk groups are babies under 6 months, older people, pregnant women and those with long-term conditions. The NHS provides the flu vaccination to those 65 and over, pregnant women, people living in care homes, children aged 2 up to those in year 5 at school and all people over 6 months of age with a long-term health condition which includes Asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Heart Failure, Kidney and Liver disease, Parkinson's, motor neurone disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Learning disabilities, Diabetes, those with a BMI over 40 or a weakened immune system on steroids, chemotherapy, sickle cell anaemia and coeliac disease. Your GP will have invited you if you have any of these conditions but if you feel you should have the flu vaccination please contact your GP surgery. It is also offered to the main carer for someone who is elderly or disabled or if you live with someone who has a weak immune system.

A common concern about flu vaccine is regarding egg allergy, this is because the flu virus used to make the vaccine is produced in eggs. The process of making the vaccine means that there are extremely low levels of egg. Unless you have had a reaction that requires intensive care then you will be able to have the vaccination in a clinic outside of a hospital.

Vaccinations work by warning your immune system of what to look out for so that when you are exposed to the virus you can start fighting it straight away and often prevent you from having any signs of the illness.

This year there are 3 types of flu vaccine; the nasal spray given to children from 2 to 18 years which is a live vaccine and more likely to cause symptoms such as temperature and running nose,

and 2 inactivated vaccines with one being more effective if you are 65 years or older but more likely to cause a local reaction such as redness and pain.

So to summarise flu is a very common, seasonal illness affecting thousands of people each year and can result in a significant cost to business and the health economy and to a few far more serious consequences. The flu vaccine is our best tool to reduce the severity and spread of the disease and is a very cost effective way to keep you and your colleagues well through the winter months.

If you would like to know more about flu please look up The Vaccine Knowledge Project by Oxford University website: vk.ovg.ox.ac.uk/influenza-flu, Public Health England, NHS.uk and the World Health Organisation.

Thank you very much for listening and I hope you found this useful.