

Flu shot recommended for those with asthma

With flu season just around the corner, it is time for you and your family to prepare. People with asthma and other chronic health conditions should sign up to receive their flu shot as soon as possible.

The flu season normally ranges from November through March. Peak months are generally December, January and February. This viral infection can cause a severe asthma attack, which can lead to potential complications including pneumonia and hospitalizations.

Millions of people in the United States get influenza every year. An average of 36,000 people per year in the United States die from influenza, and 114,000 per year have to be admitted to the hospital as a result of the flu.

Influenza is typically spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing via respiratory droplets. If someone with the flu coughs on you, you have a high chance of developing flu symptoms within four days after the initial exposure to that person. Common flu symptoms include:

- Fever
- Muscle aches and tenderness
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

Treating the flu

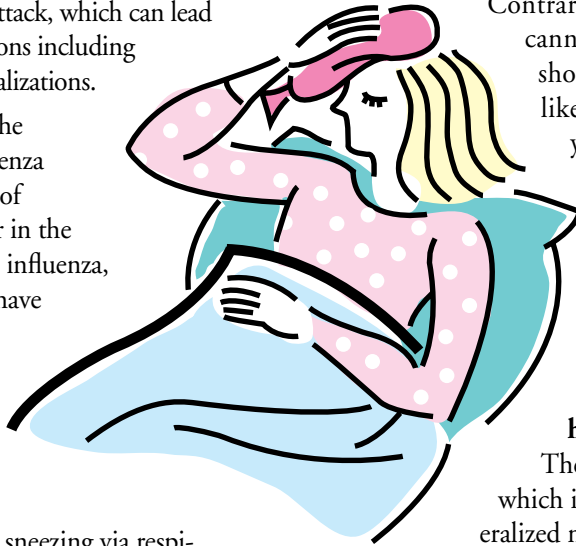
Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics, like penicillin, will not cure it. The best way to treat the flu is to prevent it by getting a flu shot each fall in October or November, before the flu season begins. It generally takes two weeks to develop immunity from the shot.

Contrary to popular belief, you cannot get the flu from the flu shot. If you feel sick with flu-like symptoms after the shot, you may have caught another respiratory virus or already had the flu virus in your system when you got the shot.

How can the flu shot help patients with asthma and other chronic health conditions?

The symptoms of the flu, which include fever, chills, generalized muscle pains, headache, fatigue and cough, can be especially severe for patients with respiratory diseases, such as asthma. In some cases, the influenza virus can damage the lungs, and influenza may make patients more susceptible to pneumonia. In severe cases influenza can be fatal.

Research has found that the flu shot decreases the risk of asthma exacerbations in patients by as much as 22% to 41%. In addition, it can also protect against acute asthma exacerbations in children. Vaccinating all children with asthma could prevent up to 78% of asthma hospitalizations and emergency room visits during influenza seasons.



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Discuss any questions that you may have regarding influenza or the flu shot with your physician. For more information, visit the AAAAI Web site, www.aaaai.org, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site, www.cdc.gov/nip/flu, or call the CDC Immunization Hot Line at (800) 232-2522.