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The flu season is imminent and we are again offering flu vaccinations to all staff. Influenza is a highly infectious disease and continues to be a major public health problem. Serious complications are commonest, and hospitalisation rates are highest in the elderly and in people with chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory disorders. However, even in healthy adults, the effects can be debilitating and last for several days.

Annual vaccination is an effective, safe way of reducing influenza's debilitating and unpleasant effects.



The following is an Influenza fact Sheet.

What is influenza?

Influenza is an acute respiratory illness caused by infection with an influenza virus

There are three types in all with influenza A and influenza B causing the majority of infections. The third type, influenza C, is rarely reported as a cause of human illness.

Pandemic

For 2009, there is the added risk of the H1N1 (Swine Flu) Pandemic. Vaccine has been developed to help prevent the spread of H1N1 influenza and first stocks are expected in Ireland by October 2009. People in high risk groups and healthcare workers will be first to receive vaccine. HSE websites www.hse.ie and www.swinflu.ie have up to date information on the pandemic and how to minimise the risk of infection.

Should I have both Seasonal Flu and Swine Flu Vaccine

HSE have issued advice that all at risk groups should avail of seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it is available. In the US, the Federal Government have advised that employers should consider offering flu vaccine to employees.

What are the symptoms?

Influenza is characterised by sudden onset of symptoms with the patient often recalling the exact hour the fever commenced. The symptoms include: -

- **a temperature of 38°C or more with a dry cough**
- **headache & chills**
- **sore muscles**
- **sore throat**

Cough is often severe and protracted, but otherwise the disease is self-limiting and recovery is 2-7 days. Long-term effects that can occur include depression and fatigue that can last weeks. Some people have a more serious illness and may need to be admitted to hospital. Complications of influenza include pneumonia, worsening of chronic medical conditions (especially chronic heart and lung conditions) and acute encephalopathy (brain swelling/inflammation). Influenza can be fatal. **Severe disease is most likely in people**

with chronic medical conditions, the elderly and women during the second half of pregnancy. Worldwide influenza causes 3-5 million cases of severe disease each year and 250,000 to 500,000 deaths.

How does Influenza Spread?

The virus multiplies in the nose and airway passage and usually spreads by aerosol droplet spray. It is highly infectious and can survive on worktops especially in low temperature and in low humidity. The incubation period (delay between infection and appearance of symptoms) is short typically 1-3 days. A person can spread the virus by sneezing or coughing from 1-2 days before the onset of symptoms and continue to be infective for a further 3-5 days. This may be prolonged to a week in children.

Why should you consider the Influenza Vaccine?

- **Protect Yourself**

The flu thrives in the typical office environment, and will infect almost one in four people this winter. Each victim will be absent for 3-5 days, and individuals can be adversely affected for up to two weeks following an infection.

- **Protect co-workers and family**

This is particularly important for office professionals as each infected employee will pass the virus to co-workers, family members and their community at large, including vulnerable high risk individuals. Each vaccination dramatically improves anyone's chances for a flu-free winter.

What can I take for influenza?

If influenza or influenza-like illness has been diagnosed, often the best treatment is to stay in bed, keep warm and drink plenty of liquids. Simple painkillers such as Paracetamol may help relieve headache or muscle pains. Antibiotics are only required if a person develops influenza related complications such as pneumonia. Anti viral medication such as Tamiflu is being made available free of charge to treat H1N1 influenza sufferers.

How long will the jab protect me?

The flu jab will protect you for one year. The specially designed syringe, the DupharJect®, with which vaccine is administered, contributes to this nearly painless application.

Why do I need to be vaccinated annually?

The influenza virus is subject to minor changes in its structure, and this gives rise to slightly different variants circulating each season. In order to produce the most effective vaccine, information is gathered on the current circulating strains and recommendations are made on the best combinations to produce the vaccine.

How does the vaccine work?

Your body starts making antibodies to the vaccine about a week to ten days after the injection, and they help protect you against any similar viruses you then come into contact with.

Is there anyone who should not be given a flu vaccine?

There are very few people who cannot receive influenza vaccine. The vaccines should not be given to those who have had a confirmed **anaphylactic reaction** to a previous dose of the vaccine or any component of the vaccine (including neomycin, kanamycin and gentamicin – antibiotics which may be present in tiny amounts). The vaccines are prepared in Hens' eggs and should not be given to individuals with known **anaphylactic hypersensitivity to egg products**. If a person is ill with a fever, the immunisation should be delayed until they have recovered.

Can the vaccine cause 'flu?

No. Influenza vaccine contains no live virus and cannot therefore cause flu.

Does the 'flu vaccine work?

Immunisation is one of the most effective health care interventions, and influenza vaccines are highly effective in preventing illness and reducing hospital admissions and deaths from flu.

Can I still get influenza despite having the vaccine?

Yes, depending on the match between the vaccine received and the strain that has caused the infection. In most circumstances, the illness is milder if you have been vaccinated.

Does flu vaccine work right away?

No. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. In the meantime, you are still at risk for getting the flu. That's why it's better to get vaccinated early in the autumn, before the flu season really starts.

When is the best time to get the flu jab?

The best time is between early October and early November, ready for the winter. You shouldn't wait until there's a flu epidemic.

Are there any side effects from the vaccine?

Influenza vaccine is usually well tolerated. Some people get flu like symptoms such as a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards and your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected. Other side effects are rare but our medical team are fully equipped to deal with any medical event which may arise.

Can influenza vaccine be given to women who are pregnant?

Yes. Pregnant women in their second trimester who have medical conditions that increase their risk of complications from influenza should be vaccinated before the influenza season. There is no evidence of risk from vaccinating pregnant women or those who are breastfeeding with inactivated virus vaccines.

The recommendation of the World Health Organization for the composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the 2009/2010 season is as follows:

The 2009-2010 influenza vaccine (northern hemisphere winter) formulation contains the **A/Brisbane/59/2007 (H1N1)-like strain (A/Brisbane/59/2007 IVR-148), A/Brisbane/10/2007 (H3N2)-like strain, (A/Uruguay/716/2007 NYMC X-175C) B/Brisbane/60/2008-like strain (B/Brisbane/60/2008).**

The three strains for the new influenza vaccine formulation were confirmed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee in March 2009 and correspond with recommendations made by the World Health Organization. Influenza vaccine is reformulated each year to match the strains predicted to circulate in the coming season. Every year the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the composition of the vaccine, based on information they get from 112 National Influenza Centres representing 83 countries all over the world.

Where can I find more information on influenza?

The HSE website www.hse.ie has links to pandemic information and our web site www.flu.ie has live news feeds from several national and international web sites.