



Health@News

Your Guide to a Healthier Lifestyle

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Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses. It affects 5 to 20 percent of the population and leads to illness ranging from mild to severe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that every year in the United States, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized due to flu complications and about 36,000 people die from the flu. Symptoms of influenza include headache, fever, sore throat, cough, aches, and nasal congestion.

FLU VACCINATIONS

The best way to avoid the flu and related complications is to get a flu vaccination. Currently, there are two types of vaccine: flu shots and nasal-spray vaccine. A flu shot is given with a needle, typically in the arm, and consists of inactivated vaccine, or killed virus, which has been grown in eggs. Nasal-spray vaccine consists of live, weakened flu viruses; these viruses do not cause the flu. Healthy people 5 years to 49 years old who are not pregnant are good candidates

for the nasal-spray vaccine. Exposure to the flu virus stimulates the body's immune response, producing protective antibodies that result in immunity. Because the viruses that cause influenza are always changing, it is important to be immunized against the most current strain of influenza every year.

WHO SHOULD BE VACCINATED?

While any person who wants to decrease his or her risk of contracting the flu virus should consider vaccination, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that the following groups are at high risk for flu complications or are in close contact with those at high risk and should be vaccinated each year.

- ⊕ Children between 6 months and 5 years of age
- ⊕ Pregnant women
- ⊕ People 50 years of age and older
- ⊕ People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions



FIGHT THE FLU

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STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT PRESCRIPTIONS

Prescription medication offers relief from both the occasional bacterial illness as well as chronic diseases including diabetes and high blood pressure. Because prescription medications are being prescribed to Americans with greater frequency, the potential for misuse of medications also increases. When prescription drugs are not used as directed, they can cause serious problems by failing to relieve the symptoms, creating health complications, and even causing death, according to American Medical Association.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT PRESCRIPTIONS

Many people find it difficult to decipher the instructions that accompany prescriptions. When your doctor recommends a medication, it is in your best interest to make sure you understand the details. Unless you follow your doctor's instructions carefully, you may not be getting the full benefit of the medicine you are paying for, and may even be putting your health at risk. Like your doctor, pharmacists are trained to alert you to potential drug

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- ⊛ People who live in nursing homes and other long term care facilities
- ⊛ Household contacts of persons at high risk for flu complications
- ⊛ Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age
- ⊛ Health care workers

WHO SHOULD NOT BE VACCINATED?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the following groups should not receive a flu vaccine without consulting a physician.

- ⊛ People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs
- ⊛ People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past
- ⊛ People who have developed Guillain-Barre syndrome within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccination previously
- ⊛ Children less than 6 months of age
- ⊛ People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to be vaccinated until their symptoms lessen.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

In addition to getting the flu vaccine each year, wash your hands frequently, avoid exposure to people who have the flu, and do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth to prevent the spread of germs. If you do come down with the flu this winter, get plenty of rest and drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Men and Exercise continued from previous page...

interactions, to advise you about certain precautions you should take when using a particular medication, and to help you avoid adverse reactions. Consider the following recommendations.

- Always take prescription medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Confirm the length of time you are supposed to take the medication.
- Be aware of how your body is reacting to the medicine, and contact your

doctor promptly if you experience any problems.

- The American Medical Association stresses the importance of informing your doctor about any other medicines (prescription or nonprescription) that you are taking and letting him or her know if you have any allergies to medicines or other medical conditions at the time a drug is prescribed.
- Ask questions and make sure that you understand instructions for taking the medicine before you leave the doctor's office. Write down instructions if necessary.
- It is important to remember that drug information labeling can change. Read the prescription label each time you refill a particular medicine.
- Never share your medication with another person, and never take medication that was prescribed for someone else.

IN QUESTION

When in doubt, it is always better to ask questions and clarify instructions. Following are some important questions to address with your physician or pharmacist.

How do you spell the name of the medicine? Make a note so that you can compare the spelling to with the prescription you receive from the pharmacy.

What is the medicine supposed to do?

How often should I take it?

Always take prescription medication exactly as directed.

What side effects may occur? It is important to be aware if drowsiness or other side effects tend to accompany the medication. It is also important to know whether or not you should drive or operate heavy machinery when taking the medication.

Can I drink alcohol while taking this drug? Combined with some medicines, alcohol can present serious risks including liver damage.

Always take medication as directed. If you develop an unusual reaction to a medication, contact your physician immediately.

Spirit of Women

St. Luke's Hospital has joined Spirit of Women, an elite coalition of American hospitals that ascribes to high standards of excellence in women's health, education and community outreach.

Spirit of Women hospitals are committed to making good health easier and to help women and their families take action that results in better health. St. Luke's is proud to be the only Spirit of Women hospital in our region.

As a St. Luke's Spirit of Women member, you're eligible to receive fabulous discounts at more than 20 area retailers* and you'll receive invitations to special, members-only events throughout the year.

A lifetime membership in St. Luke's Spirit of Women is only \$25, so call 314-205-6654 or visit www.stlukes-stl.com today to register!

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