

## Pediatric Partners Electronic News

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Today's posting contains an article by Rebecca Ruhana, MD discussing issues related to influenza and the flu vaccine.

### INFLUENZA

#### WHAT IS THE FLU

Influenza, or "the flu", is a respiratory illness. It is a virus that is spread through coughing and sneezing. People who are infected with the flu are contagious for a few days before the illness starts and for up to 5-10 days after clinical symptoms begin. Flu season runs from October to as late as May.

#### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Common symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, runny nose, body aches, fatigue, and sore throat. Children can also have nausea, vomiting, and ear infections.

#### PREVENTION

Basic preventative measures include covering your mouth and nose with tissue when sneezing, washing your hands after coughing or sneezing, and avoiding people who are infected with the flu. Also, if you or your child has the flu, you should stay home from work or school to decrease the spread to others.

Due to the national shortage of the flu vaccine, the most recent guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control state that the following people should receive the flu vaccine:

- Children 6-23 months of age
- Children over 2 years of age (and adults) with chronic lung or heart conditions (asthma), diabetes, kidney disease, blood disorders (sickle cell anemia), or weakened immune systems
- Household members and caregivers of infants under 6 months of age
- People over 6 months of age who take aspirin daily
- Pregnant women
- Healthcare workers
- Residents of nursing homes and chronic care facilities
- People over 65 years of age

Our office is only able to provide the vaccine for our patients.

### THE FLU VACCINE

There are 2 forms of vaccination against the flu.

- Inactivated vaccine, or the flu shot
- This form of vaccine contains killed virus. It is injected into the arm or leg.
  - Available for children over 6 months who do not have an allergy to eggs or chicken
  - Children under 9 years of age will need 2 doses at least 4 weeks apart the first year that they receive the vaccine
  - Possible side effects: soreness at the site of injection, low grade fever, aches. Please note-this form of vaccine contains inactivated virus so you CANNOT get the flu from the vaccine.

- Live, attenuated vaccine, or the nasal spray
  - This form contains live, weakened virus. It is sprayed into the nose.
  - Available for healthy people ages 5-49 who do not have an egg allergy.
  - The nasal spray CANNOT be given to patients who have a history of asthma, live with anyone with a weakened immune system, have a history of a reaction to the influenza vaccine, have a fever or respiratory illness, are pregnant or nursing, have a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome, or are receiving other vaccines.
  - Children under 9 years of age will need 2 doses over 6 weeks apart
  - Possible side effects: runny nose, cough, headache, muscle aches, fever, vomiting

#### DIAGNOSIS

Our office has a rapid test available that detects Influenza A and Influenza B. A sample is taken from the back of the nose with a swab. The results are available in 15 minutes. Influenza cultures can be sent to a clinical laboratory, but results take 5-10 days, so the test is not useful for our office setting.

#### TREATMENT

Symptomatic treatment includes getting rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and taking medication to reduce fever. Aspirin should never be given to children with the flu because of the risk of Reye syndrome. Because the flu is caused by a virus, antibiotics are NOT effective. There are some antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu, which can reduce the duration of illness. They are only effective if given within 48 hours of symptom onset, so if you are concerned that your child may have the flu, don't delay bringing her into the office for testing and possible therapy.

ENJOY IN GOOD HEALTH!

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