Seasonal flu vaccination myth-buster

FLU SAFE

Healthy people don't get seasonal flu. FALSE!

Anyone can pick up the virus. Generally, 15-20 per cent of the population gets flu each year - healthy people included! If you can catch flu, you can pass it on to those who are at more risk of serious illness annually. For details about other at-risk groups who are also eligible for free flu vaccinations, please go to www.coventry.gov.uk/flujab

Flu is a mild illness so I don't need to be vaccinated. FALSE!

For the majority of people who catch it, flu is simply unpleasant. For some, however, it is much more serious. Globally, seasonal flu accounts for about three to five million cases of severe illness and between 250,000 and 500,000 deaths.

The side effects of the vaccination are really bad. FALSE!

For the most part, side effects of the seasonal flu vaccination are mild or often non-existent. For the jab, these are usually a slight soreness around the site of the injection and occasionally some aching of muscles or a slightly raised temperature. For the nasal spray flu vaccination, the most common side effects are a blocked or runny nose and feeling under the weather.

I've had a flu vaccine before so I don't need it again. FALSE!

The viruses that cause flu can change every year, so you need a vaccination each year that matches the new viruses. The vaccine usually provides protection for the duration of the flu season that year.

I've had the flu already this autumn, so I don't need the vaccination this year. FALSE!

As flu is caused by several viruses, you will only be protected by the immunity you developed naturally against one of them. You could go on to catch another strain, so it's recommended you have the vaccine even if you've recently had flu. Also, what you thought was flu could have been something else.

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/flu
www.coventry.gov.uk/flujab

Coventry City Council

NHS

Warwickshire County Council

Flu vaccines aren't safe. FALSE!

The risk of having a serious (anaphylactic) reaction to the seasonal flu vaccine is just a little more than one in a million - much less than the risk of getting seriously ill from having the flu itself. The only people who should not have the vaccine are those who have a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of seasonal flu vaccine or any part of the vaccine. If you have a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to hens' eggs, you may still be able to be vaccinated, but under specialist clinical supervision or have an egg-free flu vaccine.

The nasal spray flu vaccination is not recommended for children with severe asthma (have had oral steroids in last 14 days) and active wheezing, but it is important for the flu jab to be given instead.

The seasonal flu vaccine is one of the safest vaccines in the world and is given to millions of people in the UK each year. The specific strains of flu that are included change from one year to the next, but that does not affect the safety of the vaccine or change it in any other way.

Flu vaccines can give you flu. FALSE!

A very small number of people experience side effects that are similar to those of the flu, such as aching muscles, but this is simply your immune system responding to what it thinks is an attack from flu.

I've heard the vaccines don't work. FALSE!

Studies show that seasonal influenza vaccines give about 70 to 80 per cent protection to healthy adults against infection by influenza virus strains that are well matched with those in the vaccine. This is thanks to the work of the World Health Organization and others who help ensure the closest possible match between the vaccine and circulating flu strains. Uncommonly a virus can change (drift) after a vaccine has been produced, as happened in 2014/15. However, this was just one of the 3 or 4 viruses that flu vaccines protect against. Having a flu vaccine is the best way of staying protected all winter.

I can't have the jab because I'm pregnant. FALSE!

Pregnant women should have the flu vaccination at any stage of their pregnancy. If you're pregnant, you could get very ill if you get flu, which could also be bad for your baby. Importantly, having the vaccination when pregnant helps protect their baby from flu over the first few months of life.

You're infectious after having a vaccine, so you shouldn't have close contact with anyone for a period of time after you're immunised. FALSE!

The vaccine won't make you infectious to anyone, so it's safe to carry on as normal. And even though the nasal spray contains live virus, there have been no reports of transmission of virus to other people. As a precaution people who may have contact with individuals who have a very severe problem with their immunity should have a jab instead (doesn't contain live virus).

Adapted from:

"Seasonal Flu Myth Buster" – Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust
https://www.nuh.nhs.uk/media/12105/seasonal_flu_mythbusters.pdf
"10 myths about flu and the flu jab" – NHS Choices
http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/winterhealth/Pages/Flu-myths.aspx

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/flu
www.coventry.gov.uk/flujab

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