

FLU MYTH BUSTERS

Myth: Flu is just a heavy cold

Fact: Flu and colds are different. Flu usually lasts longer and causes more severe symptoms, even worse than a heavy cold. Flu carries the risk of serious and life threatening complications. Flu can take a long time to recover with lingering fatigue and other symptoms often persisting for several weeks.

Myth: Influenza is not dangerous

Fact: For the majority of people flu is a very unpleasant illness but it can result in chest infections, pneumonia, severe complications and death. Globally seasonal influenza accounts for 3 to 5 million cases of severe illness each year and 250,000 to 500,000 deaths (WHO 2014). Young children, older people, pregnant women and those with underlying health issues are at increased risk of some of the serious complications such as ear infections which can cause permanent damage, bronchitis and pneumonia and death.

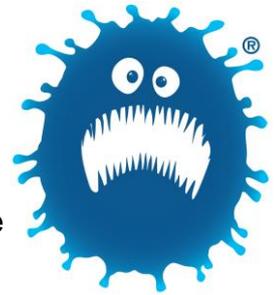
Myth: The vaccination can give you flu

Fact: The vaccine cannot cause flu because the viruses have been weakened or killed to prevent this from happening. It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to be fully effective and in this period or just before flu vaccine is given it is possible to catch flu and then attribute illness to the vaccine. Some of the possible side effects of vaccination are 'flu like' symptoms but will not be as severe, lead to serious complications or last as long as flu.

Myth: The nasal flu vaccine 'sheds' from vaccinated children and will infect others

Fact: Some people worry that children who have had a live nasal flu vaccine can pass infection onto other people. Unlike natural flu infection which spreads easily during the flu season, the amount of virus shed is below that needed to spread infection to other healthy people and the virus will not survive for long outside of the body as it is much less able to spread from person to person than the natural flu infection.

In schools using vaccine, therefore, the overall risk of contact with influenza viruses is massively reduced by having most children vaccinated. There have been no recorded incidents of serious illness amongst immunocompromised contacts who have been inadvertently exposed to vaccine virus.



Myth: Vaccines are full of dangerous chemicals and ingredients

Fact: The key components of flu vaccine are active ingredients which challenge the immune system to make antibodies to fight flu infection. These ingredients are called antigens. Apart from these, the main ingredient is water. Additional ingredients are used to stabilise the antigens, keep the vaccine sterile and maintain its correct acidity levels. It is important to understand that any ingredient of vaccine is present in microscopic levels (the whole of the nasal flu vaccine is only 0.2ml in volume), has been scientifically proven to be safe and often occurs naturally in the body anyway. All vaccines go through a long and thorough process of development and testing before they are licensed for use.

Myth: My child is fit and healthy so doesn't need the vaccination

Fact: Healthy people can develop severe complications as a consequence of flu. It is also possible to carry and pass the virus onto others without having any symptoms. Children are more likely to spread flu viruses because they do not always understand the importance of hand hygiene, sneezing into tissues etc and touch multiple surfaces.

Myth: It is better for children to build their own immunity

Fact: In order to build natural immunity, the individual needs to have been infected with the disease. Given the risks of most vaccine preventable diseases including flu, it is safer to give a vaccine to protect and prevent the disease in the first place. Natural infection does not guarantee immunity in the future.

Myth: Flu is only caught from coughs and sneezes

Fact: Flu viruses travel in droplets in the air when an infected person coughs, breaths and sneezes, they usually enter the body through the nasal passages. **However**, colds and flu viruses land on surfaces and can spread through hand contact. Items such as toys, books, IT equipment and hard surfaces can easily become contaminated. The virus can then be passed on through direct or indirect contact with these items. Regularly decontaminating hands and good housekeeping can help to stop the spread of infection but alone will not be sufficient to prevent influenza infection.

Myth: I had the vaccination last year so don't need it again

The vaccine for seasonal flu can change each year, to help protect against circulating strains of the virus. This means that the vaccine administered last year might not protect against flu this year. The vaccine is also time limited so annual vaccination is recommended to achieve the best protection.