Flu Vaccine Information for People with Down Syndrome

Flu season happens every year during the fall and winter. It is important to consider getting the yearly flu vaccine to protect yourself and your family. In this handout, learn how the flu vaccine can help protect people with Down syndrome during flu season.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT INFLUENZA (THE FLU)?

The yearly influenza (flu) vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and your family from getting the flu. Everyone 6 months of age or older should get the flu vaccine every year.

DOES THE FLU AFFECT PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME DIFFERENTLY?

Some people with Down syndrome have weaker immune systems than those without Down syndrome. This means they may be more likely to catch different illnesses, including the flu. It may also be harder to fight off illnesses. They may be sick for a longer time than those without Down syndrome. They may also be more likely to need medical attention, including hospital admissions.

ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS TO THE FLU VACCINE?

The most common side effects from flu vaccines include soreness, redness, tenderness, or swelling where the vaccine was given. Low-grade fever, headache, and muscle aches can also occur.

CAN I CATCH THE FLU BY GETTING THE FLU VACCINE?

No, you cannot catch the flu through the flu vaccine.

IS IT SAFER TO GET THE FLU OR TO GET THE FLU VACCINE?

It is safer to get the flu vaccine than to catch the flu. The flu can be a serious illness, especially for young children, older adults, and people with certain health conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes. Any case of the flu can lead to serious medical problems, hospitalization or death, even in healthy children and adults.

DOES THE FLU VACCINE CONTAIN THIMEROSAL?

Yes, but only a very small and safe amount. There are many studies that show thimerosal (a mercury-based preservative) in vaccines and other medical products is very safe. There is also a flu vaccine available without thimerosal if you prefer. If you have questions about thimerosal, talk with your doctor.

CAN MY LOVED ONE DEVELOP AUTISM FROM THE FLU VACCINE?

No. Many scientific studies have shown there is no connection between autism and any vaccines (including the flu vaccine).

WHAT IF MY RELIGION DOES NOT ALLOW VACCINES, INCLUDING THE FLU VACCINE?

Getting a flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others from getting the flu. Most religions do not have regulations or laws that prevent people from receiving vaccines. If you are concerned about vaccines and religious beliefs, talk with your doctor and a religious leader you trust.

More information on the back >>>
THE FLU: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What is Influenza?

Influenza (also called the flu) is a viral illness that affects the nose, throat and lungs. Some cases of the flu are mild, and others are severe.

When is Flu Season?

Flu season (when people are most likely to catch the flu) is mainly during the fall and winter.

What are the Symptoms of the Flu?

• Fever
• Headache
• Muscle pain
• Tiredness
• Cough
• Sore throat
• Stuffy nose

How Do People Catch the Flu?

You can catch the flu from others who are sick if they cough, sneeze, or touch shared surfaces, like doorknobs or countertops.

Where Can I Learn More About the Flu Vaccine?

• Your care team at MGHfC
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/vaccines

Rev. 8/2020. Created by Daniela Estrada Gomez, MD. MassGeneral Hospital for Children and Massachusetts General Hospital do not endorse any of the brands listed on this handout. This handout is intended to provide health information so that you can be better informed. It is not a substitute for medical advice and should not be used to treatment of any medical conditions.