

PRESS RELEASE

GEARING UP FOR FLU SEASON

Get Informed & Stay Healthy

October 10, 2011: The typical flu season runs October through May. Experts caution that the flu can be dangerous and remind us that it can usually be prevented with a simple flu shot.

WHAT IS THE FLU?

The flu is a highly contagious virus that usually enters the body through the mouth, nose or eyes. The virus can become airborne if an infected individual coughs or sneezes, thus spreading rapidly to people within close proximity. Flu symptoms are often mistaken for catching a cold or simply feeling under the weather; however, the sudden onset of symptoms, such as severe muscle aches, extreme fatigue, chills, severe chest discomfort and dry, unproductive coughing, most commonly signal the flu.

"Mild flu symptoms can quickly progress and become severe," said Dr. Elizabeth R. Pollak, M.D., Pathologist for Uintah Basin Medical Center. "If you have the flu, it's important to take precautions to protect yourself and those around you by staying home and avoiding close contact with others until you are fever-free for at least 24 hours. This will help stop the spread of the virus."

WHAT IS THE FLU SHOT?

The "flu shot" is an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. **The CDC has determined that receiving the flu vaccine does NOT cause flu, nor is it associated in any way with later onset of autism in children.**

WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED?

For the first time last year, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommended that all individuals older than six months of age receive the vaccine, and they stressed that flu shots are particularly important for the following high risk groups:

- Children under the age of five
- Adults age 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including healthcare workers

People who have had an allergic reaction to the vaccine in the past and those who suffer from egg allergies should not seek flu shots and should speak with a healthcare provider for an alternative method of protection. The vaccine is not approved for children younger than six months.

WHEN TO GET VACCINATED

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that people get their seasonal flu vaccine as soon as the vaccine becomes available in their community. Vaccination before December is best since this timing ensures that protective antibodies are in place before flu activity is typically at its highest. CDC continues to encourage people to get vaccinated throughout the flu season, which can begin as early as October and last as late as May. Over the course of the flu season, many different influenza viruses can circulate at different times and in different places. As long as flu viruses are still spreading in the community, vaccination can provide protective benefit.

AVAILABLE FLU SHOTS

There are three different flu shots available. 1) a regular flu shot approved for people ages 6 months and older, 2) a high-dose flu shot approved for people 65 and older, and 3) an intradermal flu shot approved for people 18-64 years of age. The nasal-spray flu vaccine is also available for people ages 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant.

PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST THE FLU

Practicing good hand hygiene is the single most important way to avoid spreading the flu virus. In addition, be sure to cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing. It's also important to get adequate rest, exercise, drink plenty of fluids and practice good nutrition. Doing so will not only offer some protection from the seasonal flu, but from other cold viruses that often circulate during the fall and winter months as well.

WHAT IS UBMC DOING TO HELP PREVENT THE FLU?

According to Lisa Evans, Infection Preventionist for Uintah Basin Medical Center, "Effective during the typical flu season (October-May), children under the age of 14 will not be permitted in Med/Surg, ICU or OB areas. This is for the safety of both the children and the patients".

Christy Thacker, OB Department Manager states, "For siblings of newborns, there will be a one-time visit allowed to be arranged through the OB Department if the siblings have not been ill during the previous three days".

UBMC MAKES THE FLU SHOT MANDATORY FOR EMPLOYEES

Dr. Elizabeth R. Pollak, M.D. serves as Chairman for Infection Control at Uintah Basin Medical Center. She states that "As of November 1, 2011, all personnel working at Uintah Basin Medical Center are required to have annual influenza vaccination. This includes non-contact employees as well as healthcare workers with patient contact, volunteers, and medical contractors. Employees who receive an exemption for either medical or religious reasons will be wearing a mask in the hospital during flu season to ensure that should they become infected, they will not expose patients and visitors to the hospital".

The Board of Trustees for Uintah Basin Medical Center has adopted this policy, and believes that by doing so, Uintah Basin Medical Center is following the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control, the Utah State Department of Health, the American College of Physicians and American College of Pediatrics. By adopting this policy, we are joining the majority of hospitals in Utah who have already instituted this policy, including Intermountain, University of Utah and Mountainstar.

WHERE TO GET THE FLU SHOT

The Clinic at Uintah Basin Medical Center offers a walk-in clinic on Tuesdays from 8 AM – 3 PM, Wednesdays from 10 AM – 5 PM and Thursdays 8 AM – 3 PM. The public may also call (435) 722-6130 to make an appointment.

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Uintah Basin Healthcare is a community not-for-profit healthcare system, serving the Uintah Basin since 1944. Today, Uintah Basin Healthcare is the largest and most comprehensive rural-based healthcare system in the state of Utah.