The 2012-13 Flu Epidemic: Protecting Ourselves and Our Patients

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The Winter 2012-13 Flu Epidemic: Worst Flu Season in Years

- Widespread nationally, in 47 out of 50 states
- Governor Cuomo declared a public health emergency
  - 57 NY counties and all 5 New York City boroughs have reported flu cases
- More than 19,000 cases vs. 4,000 last flu season
- 5% of all emergency room visits are related to the flu
Flu Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Fever/chills
- Cough, sore throat
- Headache
- Aching muscles
- Runny nose, sneezing
- And occasionally:
  - Diarrhea and vomiting
  - Pneumonia and other complications
Protecting Ourselves and Our Patients

- Get vaccinated! It is not too late.
  - Flu season peaks in January/February and runs through May
  - Available at worksites, covered by your Benefit Fund and at Rite Aid pharmacies
- Wash your hands frequently
- Stay home if you are sick
- Wear a surgical mask
  - Very effective, but not popular in U.S.
- Increase your resistance by eating a healthy diet, exercising, getting enough sleep and quitting smoking
Types of Flu Vaccine

- LAIV
  - Nasal spray
  - Live attenuated (weakened) influenza virus

- TIV
  - The “flu shot,” given by injection
  - Inactivated (killed) influenza vaccine

- Both vaccines contain:
  - Influenza A virus H1N1
    - Same virus as 2011-12 vaccine
  - Influenza A virus H3N2
    - Most common this year
    - More severe type
  - Influenza B
Developing the Vaccine

- WHO and CDC use seasonal surveillance to develop vaccines
  - “Match” the viruses in the vaccines to the flu viruses that are actually circulating that year
  - Lab confirmations determine effectiveness
The Flu Vaccine Is Safe and Effective

• The 2012-2013 vaccine is about 60%-70% effective (a high rate of success)

• Individual responses to the vaccine vary
  – Less effective in elderly and individuals with weak immune systems

• Takes up to two weeks after vaccination to start working
  – It is important to get vaccinated as soon as possible
Flu FAQ

• Will the flu vaccine give me the flu?

• No.
  But you could still get a different flu virus that is not covered by the vaccine. If you do, it will probably be a milder case, with fewer complications.

Even if you get the vaccine, it is still important to take precautions like washing your hands.

Occasionally, it is possible to develop flu-like symptoms while your body is building the antibodies.
Will the flu vaccine protect me against other diseases?

No.

Even if you get the flu shot, you can still get other winter illnesses with similar symptoms, like Norovirus, whooping cough, respiratory infections (RSV) and laryngitis (Rhinoviruses).
Flu FAQ

• Is it safe for me to get the flu vaccine if I am allergic to eggs?
• This year’s flu is so severe that healthcare providers are recommending you receive the flu shot anyway—but talk to your primary physician first. Depending on the severity of your allergy, your doctor may ask you to remain in the office for 30 minutes to see whether you have a reaction.
Flu FAQ

• How is the flu treated?

• There is no cure for the flu. But medications such as Tamiflu and Relenza can shorten the time you are sick, if they are taken in the first 48 hours. Your Benefit Fund covers both medications.

• Home remedies such as elderberry extract, chicken soup and turmeric can also help relieve flu symptoms.