

The CIWEC Hospital Health News

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Influenza or the “Flu”

Flu is characterized by the abrupt onset of fever, headache, muscle aches, sore throat and cough. Unlike other common respiratory illnesses, flu can be severely debilitating for a number of days resulting in inability to work or carry on with normal activities. Since flu is caused by a virus, general antibiotics cannot shorten the length or severity of illness but certain antivirals can help to prevent or treat it. Flu symptoms can also be confused with covid-19 symptoms and it makes sense to be protected against the flu.

Children less than 5 years but especially less than 2 years of age, pregnant women, persons over age 65 years and the ones with chronic medical conditions or weakened immune system are at particular risk of getting a severe illness or complications from the flu. We urge everyone particularly the high-risk group to be immunized with the flu vaccine annually.

Prevention: Flu is spread by droplets when a person with flu coughs, sneezes or talks. Flu can also be spread by contact with surfaces that are contaminated by the flu virus. If you have the flu, cover your face and nose when you sneeze or cough. Do frequent hand washing and stay away from school or work. This will help prevent spread of the virus to others. **Flu vaccine** - Flu vaccine consists of parts of four different strains of influenza virus that were in circulation the previous season. The vaccine has very few side effects, and a single injection in adults offers protection from flu for about one year.

Who should take the flu vaccine? –We recommend it to everyone **particularly trekkers** who will be exposed to crowded conditions of lodges along the trekking routes. It is now recommended that any person over 6 months of age who does not have contra-indication to getting the flu vaccine should get it. The vaccine is considered safe, and has minimal side effects. The vaccine causes antibodies to reach their full protective levels within two weeks. It is safe and effective for children over 6 months of age. Because children’s immune systems are not as developed as adults, previously un-immunized children from 6 months to 8 years of age should receive two injections a month apart to achieve full protection.

The vaccine is considered safe to use at any stage of pregnancy to prevent flu in pregnancy and also to minimize risk of flu in the baby since a baby less than 6 months old is not eligible to get the flu vaccine.

Who should not get the flu vaccine? Anyone with a severe allergy to previous dose of the flu vaccine should not get it. Egg allergy is no longer a contra-indication to getting the flu vaccine. Please discuss with your nurse or doctor if you have a history of severe egg allergy. These persons can get the flu vaccine with special precautions.

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