



## Delta Gamma Well Aware

Encompasses eight dimensions: Social, Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Vocational, Intellectual, Financial and Leadership Development

### Influenza – Are You Vaccinated?

Influenza is a serious disease and during an average year, the flu causes 36,000 deaths and more than 200,000 hospitalizations in the United States alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year.

#### General Information

- October/November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.
- There is plenty of influenza vaccine for the 2007-2008 season unlike years past. Approximately 132 million doses of influenza vaccine will be available in the U.S. for this flu season; this is the most flu vaccine ever distributed during a single influenza season in the United States.
- Annual vaccination is important because after you are vaccinated, your immunity to the disease declines over time and may be too low to provide protection, and after one year flu viruses change from year to year, which means two things.
  - First, you can get the flu more than once during your lifetime. The immunity that is built up from having the flu caused by one virus strain doesn't always provide protection when a new strain is circulating.
  - Second, a vaccine made against flu viruses circulating last year may not protect against the newer viruses. That is why the influenza vaccine is updated yearly to include current viruses.
- Other than eligible individuals who want to reduce their chances of getting the flu, people who should get vaccinated each year are:
  - Healthcare workers
  - People at high risk for complications from the flu, including:
    - Children aged 6 months until their 5th birthday
    - Pregnant women
    - People 50 years of age and older
    - 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:
    - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
    - Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age
- Some people should not be vaccinated without first consulting a physician; they include:
  - People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs

- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past
- People who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously
- Influenza vaccine is not approved for use in children less than 6 months of age
- People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms lessen

### **Types of Vaccines**

There are two types of vaccines, each containing three different influenza viruses. The viruses in the vaccines are grown in eggs and change every year depending on international influenza surveillance and scientists' estimations about which strains will circulate that year. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against the flu develop in the body. The two types of vaccines include:

- Flu Shot - an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. It is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine - a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV or FluMist®). LAIV (FluMist®) is approved for use in healthy people two to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

### **Effectiveness**

- The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on the age and health status of the person getting the vaccine, and the similarity or "match" between the virus strains in the vaccine and those in circulation.
- When the "match" between vaccine and circulating strains is close, the vaccine prevents influenza in about 70%-90% of healthy persons younger than age 65 years.
- Among elderly persons living outside chronic-care facilities (such as nursing homes) and those persons with long-term (chronic) medical conditions, the flu shot is 30%-70% effective in preventing hospitalization for pneumonia and influenza.
- Among elderly nursing home residents, the flu shot is most effective in preventing severe illness, secondary complications, and deaths related to the flu. In this population, the shot can be 50%-60% effective in preventing hospitalization or pneumonia and 80% effective in preventing death from the flu.

### **Side Effects**

- Different side effects are associated with the flu shot and LAIV.
  - The flu shot: The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur include:
    - Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
    - Fever (low grade)
    - Aches
  - LAIV (FluMist®): The viruses in the nasal-spray vaccine are weakened and do not cause severe symptoms often associated with influenza illness. In adults, side effects can include:
    - Runny nose
    - Headache
    - Sore throat
    - Cough
  - In children, side effects from LAIV (FluMist®) can include:
    - Runny nose
    - Wheezing
    - Headache
    - Vomiting

- Muscle aches
- Fever
- If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last 1 to 2 days but most people who receive influenza vaccine experience no serious problems. However, on rare occasions, flu vaccination can cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. As of July 1, 2005, people who think that they have been injured by the flu shot can file a claim for compensation from the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP).
- If you have a serious reaction to influenza vaccine, call or get to a doctor right away, letting him/her know what happened, the date and time it happened, and when you were administered the flu shot.

### **Avoiding the Flu**

- WASH YOUR HANDS – use soap and water and rub vigorously for at least 15 to 20 seconds several times a day.
- Stay hydrated – the membranes in your nose and throat trap viruses and move them back out in the form of mucus. If you are not properly hydrated, those membranes dry up and allow viruses and bacteria in, which can lead to illness.
- Avoid crowds – stay away from the mall, crowded trains or any other locations that will force you to be in close contact with potentially contagious individuals.
- Vitamins – even though Vitamin C will not fight off colds, it is still recommended to stay healthy during flu season. Vitamin D and selenium are also important flu-fighters, so make sure to eat and drink plenty of foods containing these vitamins, such as orange juice, yogurt, Brazil nuts and beef.
- Herbs – drugstores have plenty of herbal remedies but not everything works. Try an Echinacea tincture and an Astragalus supplement to help keep the flu at bay.

### **References**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>  
*Health*, November 2007

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