

In This Issue

- Getting the Flu and What to Do About it- Pediatrician's Practical Tips
- Debunking Flu Vaccination Myths
- Meet Anne Dodds
- Looking Ahead

In The News

[New Guidelines for Physicians Take Aim at Antibiotic Resistance -- California Health Line](#)

[The Race to Reverse Antibiotic Resistance -- Discover Magazine](#)

[Breast Milk Protein Could be Used in Fight Against Antibiotic Resistance -- The Guardian](#)

[There's an Apocalyptic Scenario Forming with Infections -- Here are Two Ways People are Planning to Fight Back -- Business Insider](#)

Getting the Flu and What to Do About It -- Pediatrician's Practical Tips

By Nicole Hackman, MD, and Nathan Hackman, MDiv

With cases in Pennsylvania on the rise since the beginning of the year, the flu is far more than just a common cold. Officially known as influenza, this illness can cause children and adults to be sick for more than a week with fever and symptoms including chills, cough, congestion, vomiting, diarrhea and more. The flu virus is spread through "droplets" or moisture traveling from the infected patient while they are talking, sneezing or coughing. You contract the flu by either breathing these infected droplets directly into your lungs or by touching a contaminated surface where they have landed or then transferring them to your mouth or nose with your hands. Once you have the flu, you can be contagious, transferring your own contaminated droplets, for up to a week or more. Protect yourself and prevent the flu!



You can protect yourself from the flu, with all of its symptoms and complications, by taking a few, simple preventative actions. Getting a yearly flu vaccination can dramatically reduce your risk of getting the flu. Flu vaccinations are available in a variety of locations, including your doctor's office and most major pharmacy chains, and are covered by many insurance programs. A few minutes taken for a vaccination easily outweighs a week spent in bed with the illness! Another important preventative action is frequent, thorough, hand washing. Wash your hands vigorously with soap and under warm water for at least 20 seconds before eating, after physical contact with others, and after visiting areas frequented by the public.

If you do get the flu, stay home, drink plenty of fluids and rest. Wash your hands often and avoid unnecessary contact with others. Children with the flu should not attend school or day care. Young children, persons over 65 years old, pregnant women and patients with asthma, diabetes or heart disease are at higher risk for serious complications from the flu and should call their doctor to discuss care. With a little bit of prevention, we can keep the flu away from you!

Debunking Flu Vaccination Myths

By Kristin Sznajder, PhD, MPH

Flu season is here. Many people have questions related to getting the flu vaccine. Below are a few common questions and answers.

Can the flu vaccine cause the flu?

A flu shot or nasal spray vaccine cannot cause the flu illness. The vaccine contains a weakened form of the virus that cannot cause the flu illness but does help build protection to the flu strains included in the vaccine. After receiving the flu shot, some people may experience side effects including soreness, redness, tenderness and swelling where the shot was given, as well as a low-grade fever, headache and muscle aches. Side effects to the nasal spray include a runny nose, nasal congestion and cough. Reasons why flu-like symptoms may occur after a flu shot are that the person has a different respiratory virus, the person was exposed to the flu before receiving the vaccine, or the person became infected with a flu strain not included in the vaccine. Rarely do people become infected with the flu strains in the vaccine if vaccinated. This usually happens when a person has a weak immune system. When this happens, studies have shown that people who were vaccinated have less severe outcomes than those that were not vaccinated.

Ask the Expert!

Please send any questions you may have to knowwhentosayno@pa.gov.

Your questions will be featured in the upcoming newsletters with answers from our collaborators.


If you have any ideas for future newsletters or would like more information, please feel free to contact us.

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Why is getting the flu vaccine important?

The flu can be a very serious disease, particularly in children, pregnant women, older adults and people with chronic health conditions. The flu can cause serious illness or death even among healthy adults. Further, the flu vaccine is highly contagious. So, it is not only important to protect yourself, but it is also important to protect those around you by getting vaccinated. Getting the vaccine will ensure that you don't get the flu, and if you do, your illness will be less severe.

Do I need a flu vaccine every year?

Yes, flu strains can change year to year. Even when the flu strains do not change, immunity from vaccination declines over time and will not be as effective after a year.

One of the greatest achievements in public health has been the development of vaccines. Vaccines against infectious disease have saved millions of lives by protecting people from viruses that can lead to serious illness and death. The flu vaccine is no different; it has been shown to be effective at both reducing the severity of the flu and preventing the flu. If you have questions on whether the flu vaccine is right for you, please ask your doctor.

Meet the Team: Anne Dodds, Get Smart Pediatrics Initiative

By Nkuchia M. M'ikanatha, DrPH, MPH

In this column, we will introduce key players in the Get Smart Program and the larger Pennsylvania Consortium for Antimicrobial Stewardship (PCAS).

Anne Dodds connects the Pediatrics Initiative with child care providers and parents by facilitating communications with Keystone STARS, where she serves as regional child care consultant. She links the Get Smart Program with all types of child care providers: statewide licensed facilities and home-based child care providers. For me, Anne is not simply a connector; she is a maven, to use a term from the "Tipping Point" by Malcom Gladwell. The Get Smart Program always seeks Anne's feedback on ideas regarding interventions in child care settings. For example, she is advising on an ongoing study on watchful waiting for antibiotics and barriers to vaccinations among workers in child care settings.



More details including publications:

[Keystone STARS Bio](#)
[Get Smart Publications](#)

Nkuchia M. M'ikanatha, Lead Epidemiologist for Antimicrobial Resistance Response

Looking Ahead

- Wednesday March 23 -- Get Smart Competition Award Ceremony at the Pennsylvania State Capitol Rotunda at 11 a.m. Pennsylvania Physician General Dr. Rachel Levine will launch the 2016 competition during this ceremony.