

No excuse for skipping flu shot

Who should receive a flu shot? Is there a risk of becoming sick from the shot?

Despite what rumors you may have heard, you will not contract the flu from a flu shot. The injection includes a killed form of the virus which allows your body to create antibodies and ward off the flu, said Donna Olson, director of nursing for the Charlotte County Health Department.

“There really is no reason not to get a flu shot,” she said.

Flu shots are readily available at numerous locations in the area, including all of the Health Department’s clinics. They can be received by appointment at a cost of \$25. Details can be found at the official Web site, charlottechd.com.

All injectibles include a dead form of the flu virus, which means no flu-like symptoms. Sometimes a nasal spray is used to prevent illness.

Vaccines are produced two ways. The killed medium, in the injectible form, makes it impossible for those treated to carry or share the virus.

“With the killed injectible virus, there is no transmission of the virus,” Olson said. “Your body just creates antibodies. You may have some localized swelling, some aching at the site.”

The presence of the swine flu is all the more reason officials want residents to get their traditional flu shots.

“This year, it’s pretty much a recommendation for anybody 6 months of age and up because of the co-infection with the H1N1,” Olson said. “The most vulnerable to seasonal flu tend to be young children and elderly.”

Unlike the injectible vaccine, nasal treatments in the form of a “flu mist” are grown in an egg medium. Currently, the nasal spray — otherwise known as a “live vaccine” — is the most common preventative measure for the H1N1 swine flu.

For the few who need a swine flu vaccination, the live vaccine does carry the risk of transmission, though it’s highly unlikely. The county currently has a very limited quantity of live H1N1 vaccines. A few major drug manufacturers are said to be prepping injectible H1N1 vaccines, which Charlotte County hopes to receive soon.

“We’re hoping this week to begin to see the injectibles in our order,” Olson said.

People ages 2 to 49 can receive the live, nasal H1N1 vaccine, but toddlers 7 months old and up must wait for the injectible.

The swine flu is different, because it impacts people from 6 months of age to 24 years old.

Interestingly, people born in the mid-1950s and earlier seem to have some immunities to the swine flu. It’s possible that people, over time, were exposed to a variant of the flu similar to H1N1, which prevents them from becoming sick.

“They are not the group that is having a problem with the H1N1 virus,” she said.

But all still run the risk of coming down with the regular, seasonal flu, which is why it’s still important to consider getting a flu shot, particularly when no serious side effects are involved.

Neil Hughes stays healthy by answering your questions and contributing to the Sun.