



2008 Immunization Issue Brief

Flu Vaccine: Separating Myths from Facts

February 8, 2008

MYTH: “The flu isn’t a serious disease.”

FACTS: Influenza (flu) is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. In West Virginia 412 residents died from flu or pneumonia in 2005. Most who die are 65 years and older. But small children less than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu.

MYTH: “The flu shot can cause the flu.”

FACTS: The flu shot cannot cause the flu. Some people get a little soreness or redness where they get the shot. It goes away in a day or two. **Serious problems from the flu shot are very rare.**

MYTH: “The flu shot does not work.”

FACTS: Most of the time the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70% to 90% when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. **Getting the vaccine is your best protection against this disease.**

MYTH: “You must get the flu vaccine before December.”

FACTS: Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. The best time to get vaccinated is October. **But you can get vaccinated in December or later.**

(OVER)

MYTH: “Only older people need a flu vaccine.”

FACTS: Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease need to get a flu shot. Doctors also recommend children 6 months and older get flu shot every year until their 5th birthday. **But because older children and adolescents can bring flu home to grandparents or younger siblings, the West Virginia Immunization Network (WIN) recommends a flu shot for all West Virginians each year.**

MYTH: “The side effects are worse than the flu.”

FACTS: The worst side effect you’re likely to get from a flu shot is a sore arm. The nasal mist flu vaccine might cause nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat and cough. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than 1 in 4 million.

MYTH: “All flu vaccines contain thimerosal which is linked to autism.”

FACTS: Some parents are concerned that thimerosal, a mercury-containing preservative contained in the influenza vaccine, causes autism. However, during the past few years, a series of biological and epidemiological studies have shown this concern to be unfounded. Thimerosal is used as a preservative in multi-dose vials of flu vaccine; single-dose vials without any preservative are available. **Scientific evidence clearly indicates that mercury in vaccines doesn’t cause autism.**

For More Information

About Influenza, contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Immunization Program
www.cdc.gov/nip

West Virginia Immunization Program
West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources
(304) 558-2188 or (800) 642-3634 (in WV only)
www.wvdhhr.org/immunizations/

About WV Immunization Network (WIN):

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