It’s Not Too Late to Get Your Flu Shot

If you did not receive an influenza vaccination in the fall, getting one in February or March is still important because seasonal influenza can sometimes last until May.

The highly contagious virus, spread by coughing, sneezing or by having close contact with an infected individual, is especially dangerous for adults 65 years and older because they have a high risk for developing serious complications. That age group accounts for most hospitalizations and deaths from influenza, in part because changes in immune defenses increase with age.

Medical professionals say the annual flu immunization is safe and effective. And when more people are vaccinated, fewer people get sick and need treatment.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, getting a flu vaccine this year is extremely important. “It’s vital that people protect themselves and their families by getting a flu vaccination this winter,” said Arthur Coffey, MD, chief physician operations officer at ProHealth Care. “The last thing we need is a challenging flu season on top of a pandemic.”

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that everyone six months age and older receive an annual influenza vaccine. People 65 years and older should get a flu shot instead of the nasal spray vaccine.

“IT takes about two weeks to develop antibodies to protect against the virus,” says Catherine Way MD, a family medicine practitioner with ProHealth Care. “When you receive an influenza vaccine, you will receive an information statement from the CDC. Getting a vaccine is quick, typically very painless and does not cause the influenza virus.”

Getting a flu shot each year is important because a vaccine’s immunity decreases over time and because each year’s vaccine is focused on fighting new influenza viruses that the CDC believes will be most prevalent during that particular season.

Also, flu can make long-term health problems worse. According to the CDC, those with diabetes, asthma and chronic heart disease (even if well managed) are among the most common long-term medical conditions that place people at high risk of developing serious flu complications.

Some individuals who receive the vaccine will still get the flu but medical professionals say the vaccination can make the illness less severe and lower the risk of hospitalization. “Getting an influenza vaccine is not only the best way to protect yourself but also your loved ones and the entire community,” Way says.

Call your doctor if you have any symptoms of the flu such as fever, cough, sore throat, runny/stuff nose, muscle/body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes diarrhea or vomiting. Medications called antiviral drugs can be prescribed to treat the flu and lessen the chance of serious illness.

Where to Get a Flu Shot

You can call your medical provider’s office and go there for a flu shot or you can get one at a pharmacy—either a stand-alone pharmacy or one within a grocery store. There are many vaccines available but call ahead to be sure. Oftentimes, you do not even need an appointment to get a flu shot at a pharmacy.

If you need assistance with where to go for a flu shot or need a ride to get a shot, please call Eras Senior Network at – Milwaukee County (414) 488-6500 or Waukesha County (262) 549-3348.
No Flu for You!

Do you remember the episode of the Seinfeld television show that featured a grumpy chef deciding who would get his soup every day? If the chef did not like a customer, he proclaimed “No soup for you!” This year, the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging is borrowing that phrase to encourage all of us to get our flu shots.

Although we have been paying attention to the risks and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in the recent months, we also need to be concerned about the yearly flu. It is not too late to get a vaccination, and it is your best protection against the three or four strains that the vaccination is designed to prevent. Taking steps to prevent a serious respiratory influenza illness will also help to keep you out of the hospital, especially now, when healthcare workers are busy caring for Covid-19 patients.

Here are important tips:
• The flu vaccine is available now – there is no shortage.
• The best time to get a flu vaccine is in the fall but it is not too late to get vaccinated. Late outbreaks can happen in April or May, so it’s important to get that flu vaccine now.
• Everyone over the age of six months should be vaccinated every year. Flu viruses are constantly changing and protection from vaccination declines over time, so you need a flu shot every year.

Covid-19 Vaccinations

The state of Wisconsin has started providing vaccinations for individuals age 65 years and older. At the time of this newsletter production, information about registering for vaccination appointment is evolving rapidly, with healthcare systems contacting patients to schedule appointments. We recommend calling 211 for information specific to your community and to learn more about Covid-19 vaccinations.