



Doctors, health care organizations urge citizens to get flu shots this season

by Savannah Behrends

As our cold and flu season begins, doctors look towards countries in the Southern Hemisphere who are completing their season to determine what ours might look like.

In regards to this the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices noted concerns for a potentially severe flu season.

"The flu epidemic in Australia was considerably worse than the year before with more cases and deaths," said Dr. Mark Rupp, infectious disease specialist at Nebraska Medicine.

Because of this, local doctors, the CDC and the Advisory Committee are urging anybody ages 6-months-old or older receive the flu vaccination before the end of October.

"This includes people who have conditions that compromise their immune system as well as pregnant women," said Dr. Shana Peper, internist at Methodist Physicians Clinic Indian Hills.

Rupp notes that in the past some people have had difficulty getting the vaccine due to egg allergies. The CDC recently noted that persons who have only had hives as a reaction to eggs can still get the vaccine.

People over the age of 65 are recommended to get a high-dose vaccine that is better equipped to help them, according to Dr. John Harris, internist with CHI Health Clinic.

Doctors said it's not uncommon for persons who received the vaccine to experience flu-like symptoms, such as temporary fatigue, soreness or short-lived fever.

"That's just the body building up its immune system to fight off the flu," Peper said.

"I think the risks of not getting the vaccine certainly outweigh any other concerns."

Doctors said that the vaccination is not perfect and doesn't guarantee that the person won't get the flu, but if they do it will lessen time spent sick.

Dr. Cindy Ruma, immunization nurse coordinator for the Visiting Nurse Association, said there's a lot of research and development going on to make the flu shot

more effective. But, the virus can mutate and change during the flu season making the vaccine less effective.

The flu vaccine also changes every year depending on what viral strain the CDC and the Advisory Committee predicts will hit.

Rupp said most people this year will receive a quadrivalent vaccine, which has two "A strains" and two "B strains", and will protect against A strains H1N1 (swine flu) and H3N2.

This year the CDC is not recommending nasal vaccines for the second year due to data that showed it was less effective than the shot.

Doctors note that the flu and common cold are different viruses and the flu shot will not protect against the cold. But they do suggest the same techniques to stay healthy.

"It's the kind of stuff your grandma told you," Rupp said. "Make sure you get enough rest, have a reasonable diet and exercise."

All doctors recommend washing your

hands often with warm water and soap. Rupp said that alcohol gels are also effective.

They also said that the virus is spread through droplets so it's important to cover your mouth when coughing. They also recommend keeping your distance from



Peper



Harris



Rupp

those who are sick, at least five-to-six feet of distance.

Ruma said that if you think you might have the flu, get tested right away. Tamiflu can help reduce time spent sick but only works if you take it in the first 48 hours.

"Lastly, if you are sick, stay home," Peper said. "No one wants to share your illness."

But above all doctors say getting the flu shot is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones.

"We know that the flu shot saves lives," Harris said. "We know that the flu is still deadly. We think close to 24,000 people died in the U.S. last year from it."