



PARTNER UPDATE

The difference is how we treat you.

WORK PARTNERS

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

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5 Excuses for Not Getting Flu Vaccine... And My Response

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Flu season is approaching once again and the time to protect ourselves with the flu vaccine is now. The three main ways that experts say you can reduce your risk of getting the flu are good hand hygiene, avoiding sick people during the flu season, and getting vaccinated. Frequent hand washing using proper technique is a good idea, but has its shortcomings. The flu virus can stay alive on surfaces such as desktops and doorknobs for up to 12 hours. Despite perfect hand washing habits, a person touching a contaminated surface, who then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth (common entry points for the virus), can transmit the virus to themselves. Studies show that the average person touches their face about 16 times per hour!

Staying away from sick people during the flu season is also a good idea, but its effectiveness is limited by the fact that a person with the flu is contagious 1-2 days before developing symptoms. This means that people gathered in a workplace, shopping mall, or Movie Theater could be getting exposed by persons that do not yet know they are sick. With hand washing and avoidance of sick people having limited effectiveness, which leaves the annual flu vaccine as a major way of preventing the flu. The flu vaccine is not perfect either, being only about 60 – 70% effective in preventing the flu. Each year when I talk to patients about the flu vaccine, I get the same five excuses for not getting the vaccine. Here are those excuses, and my response to each of them.

- 1. I never get the flu, so why get a vaccine?** Actually, only about 10% of unvaccinated persons get the flu in any given year, so there is a good chance that an unvaccinated person would go many years without getting the flu. Until the year that they do. Think of it as like the seatbelt in your car. Most of us have never been in a serious car accident, but we wear our seatbelts anyway, just in case.
- 2. I got the vaccine, but I still got sick.** There are many reasons for getting sick after a flu vaccine, most of them having nothing to do with the vaccine itself. The flu season coincides with the time of year when there are many other viruses circulating. Getting sick after a flu shot could be from one of these copycat viruses. In the U.S. there are 1.2 million cases of the common cold each week. The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to work, so a person could contract the flu during that two week lag period. A person could get infected with a strain of the flu not covered by the vaccine. Lastly, a person could be one of the 30–40% for whom the vaccine is ineffective in any given year.
- 3. The flu vaccine made me sick.** There is a lot of confusion on this one. The injectable flu vaccine contains but a single protein from the various strains of flu virus that are circulating the globe that year. The flu shot does not contain any actual virus particles. It is biochemically impossible for the injectable flu vaccine to give someone the flu. So if a person gets sick after getting the flu shot it is likely for one of the reason listed in #2, above. The nasal mist flu vaccine contains “live attenuated” flu virus, which means that it does contain virus particles that have been chemically treated to be inactive. This vaccine is not available this year because it has not been as effective as the injectable vaccines.

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- 4. I hate pain.** Most of us hate pain, but the discomfort from a flu shot is typically minimal to none. The site may feel a little achy the next day, but this typically goes away within a day or two. The headache, throat pain, and body aches from the flu, on the other hand, can be truly debilitating.
- 5. I just don't trust vaccines.** With hundreds of millions of doses given worldwide each year, the safety profile of the flu vaccine is well established. The myth of an association between vaccines and autism has been thoroughly debunked. In fact, the paper making that claim has been retracted by the publisher, and deemed by investigators to be a deliberate medical fraud.

Flu vaccinations usually begin in October, before the flu season hits during the winter. It takes two weeks for the vaccine to become effective, and the flu season in San Diego County is typically January through March. You need a new vaccination each year because the vaccine gets reformulated every year to match the strains of flu circulating the globe at that time. Stay healthy this flu season!

WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists

Located in North San Diego County, WorkPartners clinics are full service Occupational Health clinics dedicated to supporting the health and wellness of local employees. Learn more at www.WorkPartnersOHS.com.

