

FLU SEASON IS COMING – SHOULD YOU GET THAT SHOT?

Every year flu season runs from November to April and every year about this time we start seeing promotions for people to line up, roll up their sleeves and get a flu shot. And further more, bring the kiddies too. But is it effective? Does it really prevent the flu? And is it safe?

In 2005 a study published in The Lancet medical journal reviewed all studies evaluating the effectiveness of flu vaccination for those 65 or older during the past 40 years. This analysis, one of the most comprehensive ever conducted, found that vaccination prevented 30 to 42 percent of hospitalizations. Tom Jefferson, an epidemiologist who led the analysis for the Cochran Collaboration stated, “It’s very disappointing.” Optimal response should be in the vicinity of 90 percent. It is particularly disappointing because people 65 or older are among those at highest risk for complications from flu and are those at whom the marketing is aimed to encourage vaccination.

2004 was the year that the vaccine manufacturers guessed wrong on the strain of flu virus that would predominate that year but the CDC recommended the vaccines be used anyway and increased the recommended dose to two. The CDC Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report of August 13, 2004 reported that of 5139 children, only 7 percent received the recommended two doses of vaccine. In those children there was a 25 percent reduction in influenza like illness and a 49 percent reduction in pneumonia and influenza. In children receiving one dose of vaccine, there was **no statistical reduction in either disease**. The study was never published in a peer reviewed journal.

Vaccine safety studies using inactivated influenza virus in young children are not readily available. The safety of vaccines containing mercury has not been established. When vaccine stores run low, the CDC tends to assert that vaccines containing mercury are better than nothing. Parents will have to decide whether they will risk testing unproven vaccines on their children.

During the 2003-4 influenza season of all the specimens tested in the United States by CDC approved laboratories, only 18.9% were positive. In other words almost 80% of individuals suspected to have influenza in the US did not have the flu. **The majority of “influenza like illnesses” are NOT caused by influenza viruses and are impervious to the vaccines.**

If all of this leaves you feeling helpless, listen to this one. A study done in Pakistan in 2005 and also published in The Lancet showed that washing hands with soap decreased incidence of pneumonia among children younger than five by **50 percent**. There are advantages to using **a plain bar of soap**:

- It really works
- It is absolutely safe
- It is competitively priced
- It is easily available
- It has never contained mercury

It has a long shelf life
It does not hurt unless you get it in the eye

Vaccination is a personal decision which must be made by each family. I encourage you to make it an informed choice.

Dr. Ruth Martens is a family physician in Wheaton specializing in nutrition, healthy lifestyles, and classical homeopathic medicine for 27 years. She is board certified in Classical Homeopathy. For more information call (630) 668-5595.