Title: Should I get an Influenza virus vaccination? If so, which type should I get?

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Plain Language Summary:

Influenza, also known as ‘the flu’ is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. It occurs seasonally every year. The number of cases are different each year. From 1976 to 2006 the number of deaths in the United States from the flu varied from 3,000 to 49,000. It most commonly causes mild to severe illness but in rare cases can cause death. Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches, feeling tired, and throwing up.

Some people are at higher risk for Influenza. These people include older adults, young children, and pregnant women. Those with diabetes, heart disease, and asthma are also at higher risk. Other problems that can happen with the flu include lung infections, ear infections, worsened chronic medical conditions, and dehydration.

Getting a vaccination against the Influenza virus is the best way to prevent the illness. There are two popular types of vaccinations available. One is the shot vaccine given into the muscle or skin and has killed virus. The other is the nasal spray vaccination that has live, weakened virus. The shot can be used for healthy people over 6 months of age, pregnant women, and those with long-term medical problems. The nasal spray is approved for those between age 2 and 49 years. It cannot be used for pregnant women or for those with health problems like asthma that increase the risk for flu complications. New studies have found the shot to be equal to or better than the nasal spray for adults between 17 and 60 years old. Still, more research is needed.

Currently the Center for Disease Control recommends all those over 6 months of age to receive a vaccination. People with some long-term medical problems, people over 65, pregnant women, American Indians, and people who work in nursing homes should definitely be vaccinated. See the resources below for more information on these health problems.

There are some people who should not get a vaccine. These people include those with a bad allergy to chicken eggs. Also, those who have had a bad reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past should not be vaccinated. Children younger than 6 months of age should not be vaccinated. People with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralytic illness) that happened after receiving the influenza vaccine as long as they are not at risk for severe illness from Influenza, should not be vaccinated. Those who have are sick with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until they are better.
Additional Resources:

For more information:
CDC – Seasonal Influenza
http://www.cdc.gov/flu/

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources
www.flu.gov

Medline Plus-Patient Education Tutorials

Key Words:

Influenza Virus
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Flu
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H1N1

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