



## The Flu Vaccine- Myth busting fact sheet

### Common myths:

#### **1. The Seasonal flu vaccine gives you the flu.**

*No, it doesn't. The injected flu vaccine that is given to adults contains **inactivated** flu viruses, so it can't give you flu. Your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected, and some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a day or two, but other reactions are very rare.*

*The children's flu nasal spray vaccine contains live but weakened flu viruses that will not give your child flu, however it may have similar symptoms.*

#### **2. Pregnant women cannot have the vaccine because it is live.**

*The adult flu vaccine is not live. You should have the vaccine whatever stage of pregnancy you are in. If you're pregnant, you could become very ill if you get flu, which could also be dangerous for your baby. Having the jab can also protect your baby against flu after they're born and during the early months of life as babies cannot be vaccinated.*

#### **3. Having the flu is just like having a heavy cold.**

*A bad bout of flu is much worse than a heavy cold. Flu symptoms come on suddenly and sometimes severely. If you get complications caused by flu, you could become seriously ill (e.g. meningitis, septicaemia) and have to go to hospital, this can occur whether you suffer with a chronic condition or not.*

#### **4. Once you have a flu jab you are protected for life.**

*No, not true. The viruses that cause flu can change every year, so you need a vaccination each year that matches the new viruses. The vaccine usually provides protection for the duration of the flu season that year.*

#### **5. Vitamin C can prevent the flu.**

*No, it can't. Many people think that taking daily vitamin C supplements will stop them getting flu, but there's no evidence to prove this.*

#### **6. The Flu vaccine contains the heavy metal Mercury.**

*An ethyl mercury-based preservative known as "Thimerosal" is sometimes used in vaccines that contain more than one dose (multi-dose vials). It is used to prevent the growth of dangerous bacteria and fungus. It is not found in any of the childhood or adult vaccines routinely used in the UK. "Oxford Vaccine Group 2015"*



## **Flu & its complications**

- *The flu virus is predominantly spread through droplets, including sneezing and coughing. It can also be spread through direct contact, (touch) and indirect contact (worktops, objects, upholstery)*
- *Antibiotics cannot treat flu as it is caused by a virus not bacteria! However if flu causes serious bacterial complications antibiotics may be given.*
- *The flu virus can be transmitted to people by both symptomatic (showing symptoms) and asymptomatic (not yet showing symptoms) but this person is still harbouring the virus*

## **Seasonal flu can worsen and cause:**

- *Bacterial chest infection ( pneumonia); which occasionally can become life threatening;*
- *Other uncommon complications include infection in the brain and spinal cord (meningitis);*
- *Infection of the blood that causes a severe drop in blood pressure (septic shock);*
- *Infected tonsils (Tonsillitis);*
- *Fluid collection in the infected ear (Otitis media);*
- *Inflammation of the brain (Encephalitis)*
- *Affects growth of foetus, triggers premature labour or increase the risk of still birth or miscarriage in pregnant women*

## **Benefits of the vaccine**

- *Reduction in deaths due to Influenza related pneumonia.*
- *The vaccine will help reduce risk of hospital admissions due to pneumonia and other complications in those who are vaccinated and in vulnerable people including those with chronic diseases.*
- *People with long term conditions have low immunity to infections; flu vaccinations will reduce the chance of getting infections and reduces the complications of flu related illness.*

***All frontline Health & Social Care workers should have their flu jab as their job role means they are a major source of infection transmission.***

***It is important that they protect themselves, their family and friends from getting the infection through their high risk patient contact.***

## References:

- <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/pages/flu-influenza-vaccine.aspx>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>