Seasonal Flu Vaccination
- an update for Healthcare Workers

October 2016
Aim of this resource

This resource aims to update knowledge amongst the healthcare workforce of flu and the benefits of flu vaccination.
Learning Outcomes

On completion of this resource healthcare workers will be able to:

• Describe the nature of the influenza virus
• Explain the risks of flu to healthcare workers and to those they care for
Learning Outcomes (cont’d)

• Understand the impact of flu and the importance of receiving the seasonal flu vaccine
• Understand how the flu vaccine works
• Be able to dispel the common myths around flu and the flu vaccine
What is Flu?

Flu is:
• A highly infectious illness
• An acute viral infection of the respiratory tract
• Spread by droplets, sneezing and hand to mouth/eye contamination from infected surfaces
What is Flu? (cont’d)

• There are different types of influenza virus
• The influenza virus is always changing and evolving
• The flu vaccine contains specific strains of influenza virus which are predicted to be circulating in the forthcoming season

That is why it is important to get vaccinated every year!
What is Flu? (cont.)

Possible complications of flu

**Common**
- Bronchitis
- Ear Infections
- Sinusitis

**Less common**
- Pneumonia
- Meningitis
- More serious illness in neonates, pregnant women, older people and those with underlying disease
Why flu vaccination is important

Risks to Healthcare workers and their family

• Healthcare workers are at increased risk of flu compared to the general adult population—especially those with frontline clinical patient contact (Kuster et al. 2011)
• Transmission of influenza virus between healthcare workers has been documented (Srinivasan et al. 2009 & Magill 2011)
• Increased risk of infection to healthcare workers may also place their household contacts at increased risk of infection (Hollymeyer et al, 2009)
Why vaccination is important (cont.)

Risks to patients

• Transmission of influenza virus from healthcare workers to patients has been identified as an important source of infection with flu for patients (Weingarten et al, 1989 & Elder et al, 1996).

• Patients are likely to belong to a risk group for severe infection and flu associated complications (Salgado et al, 2002, Cunney et al, 2000, Chironna et al, 2010, Ruel et al, 2002 & van den Dool et al., 2008 & 2009).
Why vaccination is important (cont.)

Risks to patients

- Staff shortages due to flu related healthcare worker absenteeism can have negative effects on patient outcomes (Cho et al, 2008 & Saxen et al, 1999)
- Limited evidence suggests that vaccinating healthcare workers reduces morbidity and/or mortality in patients (Thomas et al, 2010 and 2013, Ahmed et al, 2014)
Vaccine effectiveness

• Flu vaccination reduces laboratory confirmed flu among healthy adults (which includes most healthcare workers)

**Flu Vaccine**

- The flu vaccine is an inactivated vaccine
- Inactivated means that the influenza viruses in the vaccine have been killed and cannot cause flu
- The body responds by producing antibodies (memory cells) which protect the person from subsequently developing flu if they come across the real virus
- The vaccine is given as an injection into muscle in the upper arm
Flu vaccine (cont.)

- Protection takes 10-14 days to fully develop
- Protection lasts for only one flu season (at least) that is why annual vaccination is important
- On average offers 50% protection but higher in years (up to 70-80%) when vaccine well-matched to circulating strains
Flu Vaccine (cont.)

- The majority of people have no problems following flu vaccination
- If there are any side effects the most common is a local reaction at the injection site
- The majority of healthcare workers can have the vaccine - only those who have had a serious (anaphylactic) reaction to a previous flu vaccine or who are allergic to any of the components cannot have the vaccine
Common myths about flu

• “Healthy people don’t get flu!”
Anyone can get flu! Generally, around 15 to 20% of the population get flu every year-including healthy people like you. Even if you are healthy, and you get flu you can still pass flu on to others, particularly those at more serious risk of infection and complications.
Common myths about flu (cont.)

• “Flu is a mild illness!”
  For the majority of people that is the case. Each year, however, a number of individuals are admitted to hospital with confirmed flu requiring intensive care management, some of whom sadly die due to pneumonia or other complications of flu
Common myths about flu (cont.)

• “The side –effects of the vaccine are really bad!”
  Side effects are usually mild. There may be some pain, redness and swelling locally which usually lasts for 24-48hrs

• “The flu jab can give you flu!”
  The vaccine does not contain any live viruses so it is impossible for it to give you flu!
Common myths about flu (cont.)

• “I have had the flu jab before so I don’t need it again!”
  The vaccine and circulating strains change most years so you do need to be immunised each year”

• “I had to go off sick after the vaccine last year!”
  This may have been the cold or another bug. The vaccine takes 10 days to work, so you may have been unlucky & caught the flu just before getting vaccinated. It was not the vaccine!
Common myths about flu (cont.)

• “The flu jab isn’t safe!”
  The risk of having a serious (anaphylactic) reaction is less than one in a million

• “I can’t have the flu jab because I am pregnant!”
  The flu vaccine can be safely given to women at any stage of pregnancy. The sooner in the flu season that you are immunised the sooner you (and your baby) are protected
Common myths about flu (cont.)

• “It hasn't been properly tested!”

The seasonal flu vaccine is one of the safest vaccines in the world and is given to millions of people in the UK each year. The specific strains of flu that are included may change from one year to the next but that does not affect the safety of the vaccine or change it in any other way.
Common myths about flu (cont.)

• “You’re infectious after having the jab, so you shouldn't have close contact with anyone for a period of time after you're immunised!”

The vaccine won’t make you infectious to anyone, so it’s safe to carry on as normal
Key Points

• Healthcare Workers are at increased risk of developing flu

• Healthcare Workers are a key source of flu transmission in health care settings

• Immunisation of Healthcare Workers is likely to reduce morbidity and/or mortality in patients

• Flu vaccination is the best way to protect healthcare workers
References


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