

INFLUENZA (FLU) MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTH: “I never get the flu”

FACT: Because the flu virus changes from year to year, your immune system cannot protect you with antibodies that you have previously developed. Therefore, a large portion of the population is vulnerable and generally 20% are affected every year. This year **you** are at risk....and you have good reasons to stay healthy!

MYTH: “Influenza is not a big deal”

FACT: Influenza is a serious disease – along with its complications, it kills 1400 British Columbians every year. It is the number one cause of vaccine preventable deaths! Elderly and immunocompromised people are especially vulnerable. While most people will fully recover in 1-2 weeks, the illness is dramatic, with sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle pain, and prostration.

MYTH: “Last year I got the vaccine but I still got the flu”

FACT: The vaccine will only prevent illness caused by the influenza virus. There are several other viruses that may cause similar symptoms but the illness is generally milder. Since the vaccine is not 100% effective, there could be cases despite immunization; **however, the severity of disease will be lessened.**

MYTH: “If I get sick, I will just stay home”

FACT: People who are infected with influenza are contagious before they develop symptoms, and can therefore unwittingly infect others. The best way to prevent this is by getting vaccinated yearly.

MYTH: “The vaccine can cause serious side effects.”

FACT: Most people have little or no reaction to influenza vaccine. Mild symptoms such as redness or soreness at the injection site can be effectively treated with acetaminophen for 1 or 2 days. The vaccine cannot cause disease because it is not a live virus.

MYTH: “Influenza vaccine can cause flu”

FACT: Influenza vaccine cannot cause disease because it is not a live vaccine. However, Influenza vaccination occurs at a time of year when “colds” are more common. Sometimes, people mistake these colds for Influenza and incorrectly think that the “Flu shot” made them sick.

MYTH: Vaccines weaken the immune system by not allowing the body to develop its own response.

FACT: Over the decades that vaccines have been in use, this has never been shown to be the case. Vaccines work by stimulating, not over-riding, the immune system.