

## BIRD FLU, FLU SHOTS, AND YOU

What exactly is the Flu?

Influenza is caused by a flu virus. This virus mutates easily, so every year there are different strains. Viruses are the cause of most common colds, but the flu virus can cause more discomfort and complications. Flu differs from a common cold because of additional symptoms including fever, chills, headache, body aches, and significant fatigue. Certain non-influenza viruses can also cause flu-like symptoms. Deaths from complications of the flu are estimated to average 36,000/year in the US-mostly from susceptible populations (frail elderly or pediatric populations, immunocompromised patients, those with lung and heart diseases, pregnant women and others). There is some suspicion that this number is highly inflated. The Hong Kong flu pandemic of 1968-69 was estimated to cause only 33,000 deaths worldwide.

What is the real benefit of the flu shot?

The flu shot introduces inactivated flu virus into your body. This is designed to prime the immune system to recognize and fight off the flu virus when you are exposed through normal avenues. By "priming" your immune system against it, you are much less likely to develop flu symptoms. It takes about two weeks for the shot to take effect. Reduction of flu incidence is commonly promoted to be 70-90%, but a closer look reveals that this is misleading. After 40 years of data review, it was determined that for people over 65, the effectiveness was about 28%. Other recent research showed that flu shots did not reduce the numbers of deaths overall. They have been shown to reduce hospitalizations, and elderly patients in nursing homes had more benefit. There is virtually no research demonstrating value to children! Pregnant women may not want to expose their developing baby to mercury- a neurotoxin that is added to the vaccine as a preservative. Flu viruses transform every year, and there are many strains. The best guess is made at what 3 biggest strains will emerge before the next flu season occurs, and vaccines are made against these strains. If the guess is wrong, much less immunity is provided. The Center for Disease Control statistics for the 2003-2004 flu season estimated that protection against the flu was as low as 14%. Also, the CDC reported that of the first 93 children who died from the flu, 60 had been vaccinated. Flu shots are not effective at all against the non-influenza viruses that cause flu-like symptoms.

What is the downside to flu shots?

The flu shot contains ingredients such as ethylene glycol (also used as antifreeze), phenol (a disinfectant), formaldehyde, aluminum and mercury. There have also been quality control problems at certain manufacturing plants.

Side effects from the vaccination can include fever, fatigue, painful joints, and headache (flu-like symptoms). These can begin within 12 hours of the shot and last several days. Other reactions affect the nervous system and can be serious.

Flu Mist is another type of vaccine-a nasal spray intended to have effects similar to the flu vaccination without the shot. One big difference is that it contains live flu virus. It is only recommended for healthy populations-those who are least susceptible to flu complications. Those who are at risk for flu complications are specifically not to use this. People who receive the spray are instructed to AVOID SUSCEPTIBLE POPULATIONS FOR 21 DAYS as you can infect them. Side effects include-you guessed it-flu symptoms.

What about the anti-flu drugs?

There are four prescription anti-viral drugs available for flu treatment once you get the flu. The benefit is low-about 1 days shortening in symptom duration, and the drugs must be started within 48 hours of symptom onset. Some reduction of complications to the flu have been seen with drug use. Three of these drugs, including Tamiflu, can be prescribed to prevent getting the flu if there

is an outbreak that has a high exposure potential (for example, staff working in institutions or health care workers). However, correct timing of the dosage is problematic. Viral resistance to some of the drugs has already been seen.

The FDA approved Relenza in spite of the negative recommendation from its scientific advisory committee in February, 1999. It has since been shown to cause lung damage and is not recommended for people with breathing difficulties (the type of people who might especially need extra support if they get the flu). Amantadine has a high incidence of central nervous system side effects in elderly populations. This drug is also used to treat Parkinson's disease. Other side effects of these drugs include gastrointestinal distress and...flu-like symptoms!

What is different with the Bird-Flu?

Currently, the Avian flu spreads from birds to humans only with close contact between the two. The concern is that the virus may mutate and be able to spread from human to human. The symptoms from the bird flu seem to be such more severe than regular influenza, so there is greater potential for deaths. There is a wide difference of opinion in the scientific community whether a pandemic will result.

The 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic was treated successfully by homeopathic physicians of the time, resulting in a death rate of only 1.5% of infected patients.

What can I do to help prevent getting the flu?

The best defense is a strong immune system. Reduce sugar intake, stress levels and get adequate sleep. Yes, this can be challenging around the winter holiday periods. Frequent hand washing and avoiding hand-to-nose/mouth contact is extremely useful. For people who need them, there are certain botanical and nutritional medicines that can be used for long-term immune system support.

What about Naturopathic treatment of flu symptoms?

If you do get the flu or flu-like symptoms, we feel the best approach is to start taking short-term immune boosting or anti-viral botanical/vitamin and /or homeopathic products. Not all medicines are equal in efficacy, and they must be taken in adequate dosages. Also there are many naturopathic and homeopathic medicines that are effective for relieving flu symptoms when used properly.

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**Blackbird Clinic PLLC specializes in naturopathic and nutritional medicine.**  
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