Top Flu Myths

Why we shouldn't dodge the needle

November 28, 2006 By Arnesa Howell

Avoiding the flu shot? Well, think twice, especially if you're over 65, pregnant or have chronic health problems. Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent influenza, which kills about 36,000 Americans yearly. Kimberly Smith-Griffin, MD, of Suffolk, Virginia, debunks common misconceptions about getting immunized.

Myth: The flu shot will make me sick.

Reality: It is possible to get flulike symptoms as your body adjusts to the vaccine, but it's very rare. And feeling out of sorts for a day or so is better than being stuck in bed for a week.

Myth: The vaccine doesn't work! I've had friends who got the flu anyway.

Reality: The vaccine reduces your chance of catching the flu by 85%. Still, it's possible to catch a different strain of the virus, and it takes about two weeks for the vaccine to kick in. Ask your doctor how to stay healthy during that window.

Myth: It's too late in the season for a flu shot to be effective.

Reality: Flu season runs from October through February, so getting a shot in January can protect you for the rest of the season.

Call your doctor or visit the American Lung Association's flu clinic locator at www.flucliniclocator.org to find out where to get the shot.

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