

FREQUENTLY ASKED FLU QUESTIONS

Ask CCMH your flu questions here:

<http://www.charlescolehospital.com/contactform.shtml>

More FAQs can also be found by visiting www.flu.gov.

Q: *We are still not sure whether we want our baby/child/teen to have the new H1N1 vaccine because it hasn't been tested enough yet.*

A: Actually, this vaccine has been tested extensively in a way that the regular flu shots are not because they have been made the same way for years. The big difference between this vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine is that the H1N1 has a single strain for a version of the flu that is actually circulating now, whereas the seasonal flu has 3 different strains based on predictions of which ones will be most likely to circulate that season.

~ Dr. Marlene Wust-Smith

A: I tell patients that the H1N1 vaccine has been tested more than the regular seasonal flu vaccine and has been shown to be very safe and very effective. I like to give patients a mathematical perspective: while the risk that they may have a serious reaction to the vaccine is about 1 per 1 million, the risk that they will catch the H1N1 virus this season ranges from 50 to 90% and the risk that they may become very ill from it, while low, is still quite a bit greater than the risk of a serious reaction to the vaccine. I then ask, which risk do you want to take?

I also take care to remind people that the H1N1 virus is circulating currently in our communities, so that if a patient gets sick within 48 hours of receiving the vaccine this is a coincidence, not a reaction to the vaccine. They are getting sick because they were exposed just prior to or around the time they happened to receive the vaccine.

~ Dr. Mary Ann Rigas

Q: *We heard through our prayer chain at work that someone who got the shot had some sort of nerve problem after getting the shot and can only walk backwards. We heard that a lot of people have died as a result of getting the vaccine and we don't want to take a chance and give it to our children.*

A: I have not seen or heard of any reports of anyone dying from the vaccine, but I have heard and read about deaths and hospitalizations of people who have contracted the novel H1N1 influenza. As

for the lady who supposedly can walk backward, I have also not heard of this other than as a rumor that other patients have told me about. There is something called Guillan-Barre Syndrome which is a rare muscle disorder that develops when a person's immune system attacks the nerves causing muscle weakness and difficulty walking. Guillan-Barre occurs in approximately 1 per 100,000 people who have not received any vaccines. Immunizations have been speculated to cause a slight increase in the number of people affected by GBS (2 per 100,000), but this is still being studied. I think the numbers are still in favor of vaccination, because the swine flu is very prevalent right now and has caused significant illness in at-risk groups. If you or your child has a history of egg allergies, or Guillan-Barre syndrome, however, it may be recommended that you not receive this (and other) vaccines.

~ Dr. Marlene Wust-Smith