



# DENTAL INFECTION CONTROL AWARENESS MONTH | SEPTEMBER

## Talking to patients about the Influenza (Flu) vaccine and answering their questions.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone age 6 months and older, with few exceptions, receive the influenza vaccine each year, preferably by October before the flu season typically ramps up. Talking to patients about this while reviewing their medical history can help encourage patients who have not already received the vaccine to do so. The Q&A below may help you address questions patients may have.

**Q.** Should I be concerned about coming to the dental office where there might be people with influenza (the flu)?

**A.** Our office asks all patients who are sick, including those with influenza (the flu), to stay home and make a different appointment for when they are better.

**Q.** What can I do to protect myself from catching the flu?

**A.** The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older, unless they have a severe allergy to any of its ingredients, have a flu shot every year as soon as it's available—preferably by October. You should also stay away from people with the flu and wash your hands frequently to avoid spreading germs.

**Q.** Why should I get a flu shot?

**A.** Having a flu shot can help protect you. The more people who've had a flu shot, the lower the chance that the flu will spread in your community and across the country. If you think about the recent measles outbreak, it spread where relatively fewer people were vaccinated against it, and was caught by people who had not received the measles vaccine (MMR). The same thing happens with the flu.

**Q.** I'm really scared (my child is really scared) of needles. Is there any other way to get a flu shot?

**A.** It depends on your age, health and any conditions you may have. A nasal spray vaccine is available for people between age 2 years and 49 years-of-age, and a needle-free jet method that pushes the vaccine under the surface of the skin using a high-pressure thin stream of fluid can be used for patients 18 to 64 years-of-age. Your physician can advise you on which method is suitable for you.

**Q.** If I have the flu shot, how long does it work for?

**A.** A flu shot protects most people for the whole flu season. For older people and others with a weaker immune system, it may become less effective during flu season—it still gives some protection though.

**Q.** I had a flu shot last year, do I really still need one again?

**A.** For everyone, having a flu shot each year provides the best protection. By the time the next flu season starts the following year, your immunity is lower and the type(s) of flu might also be different.

**Q.** What about my child?

**A.** If your child is under 6 months of age, he/she is too young to have a flu shot and it's important to keep your child away from people with flu. If your child is 6 months to 8 years, he/she may need 2 doses of the flu vaccine instead of one, at least 4 weeks apart. Your physician/pediatrician can advise you on this.

**Q.** I heard that last year's flu shot wasn't that effective. Why should I still have one?

**A.** There are many types of flu and flu viruses (germs). Each year, the flu shot is made to work against three or four types of flu expected to be present that year. Sometimes there are other flu viruses as well, and that can mean that the vaccine is not a perfect match against the flu. Even when this happens, the flu vaccine can still provide some protection. The best match possible is made for each flu season.

**Q.** I heard that the flu shot can cause serious health problems?

**A.** The flu (influenza) itself can cause serious problems (and even death). The biggest risk to your health is not getting a flu shot. The risk of problems after getting a flu shot is extremely low and can be due to allergies and conditions you have. Make sure to fill in your medical history form on allergies (including to eggs, since many flu vaccines contain egg) and any other conditions you may have, and let your healthcare professional know if you are feeling unwell, so that you receive the best vaccine/care for you personally. For your health and your family's health the best thing you can do is to have a flu shot.

**Q.** What should I do if I have the flu?

**A.** You should stay home and avoid contact with other people so that you do not spread the flu. You should also contact your physician. Antiviral drugs are available that work against the flu virus and reduce the chance of serious complications. Antivirals are recommended if you are very sick with the flu, and, for children under 2 years, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with certain medical conditions. They may also be used on other patients to reduce the severity of the flu.

