

IMMUNISATION CAMPAIGN CLAMPS DOWN ON THE FLU

The HSE's winter immunisation campaign is alerting healthcare workers, including emergency services personnel, that they can prevent the spread of influenza (flu) and save lives every year by getting the flu vaccine themselves.

Did you know that every year in Ireland 200 to 500 people die from flu? Influenza (flu) is a highly infectious viral illness spread by coughs and sneezes. Every year in Ireland one in ten people will get flu during the winter months.

Flu may be mild in some people but for many others it can be life-threatening. Flu is very different from the common cold. Flu symptoms start suddenly - usually with a high temperature, chills, sore throat, muscle pains and a headache lasting two to seven days.

The best way to prevent flu it is by getting the flu vaccine. The annual flu vaccination campaign takes place from September to encourage those at risk – people with long-term medical conditions and the over 65s and pregnant women – to get the flu vaccine. The 'at risk' groups are more likely to get sick and end up in hospital with complications if they get flu.

Flu vaccine is also recommended for healthcare workers including emergency services personnel. This is mainly down to two reasons. Firstly, healthcare workers are up to 10 times more likely to get the flu, which will result in taking time off work and feeling very unwell.

Secondly, if you get flu you can spread it to others including vulnerable patients. Anyone with flu can be infectious from one day before symptoms start three to five days after symptoms start.

This means that you can pass on the flu virus to a vulnerable patient even before you know that you are sick. The flu vaccine will protect you against spreading the flu to vulnerable patients and to your family and friends.

THE 'AT-RISK' GROUPS

Healthcare workers, including emergency



services personnel, can prevent the spread of flu and save lives every year by getting the flu vaccine. If you are healthy and get flu you may only have a mild illness but for those at high risk, including your patients it could be fatal.

Those in the 'at-risk' groups may not get enough protection from the vaccine themselves, so they rely on the people around them to keep them safe. We know that if health care workers get the flu vaccine, it protects vulnerable patients and results in up to a 40 per cent reduction in patient deaths.

Flu vaccine is very safe. It does not contain live flu virus so it cannot give you the flu. Flu viruses change from year to year so new vaccines have to be

developed each year to protect against each new emerging strain.

This season's vaccine will give 40 to 90 per cent protection against the flu viruses circulating this winter and all the expert bodies recommend getting the vaccine every year is the best protection against flu.

Healthcare staff, including emergency services personnel, are vaccinated to prevent spread of the disease. So, get your flu vaccine now – it's a lifesaver!

The flu vaccine and additional information is available from occupational health teams, GPs or pharmacists. For more details visit www.immunisation.ie or www.hpsc.ie