

Transcript: Patient Multimedia Module

Immunization: Your Strongest Defense

The Home Health Quality Improvement National campaign, known as HHQI, welcomes you to this short educational program called *Immunization: Your Strongest Defense*. We will talk briefly about flu, pneumonia, and shingles and how to prevent these illnesses. So let's start with a few facts about the flu.

Did you know that young children, older adults, and people with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems are at the highest risk for getting the flu, being hospitalized, and dying from the flu? Did you know that the flu usually last 7 days or more, but related complications such as pneumonia or other breathing problems can last longer?

The flu and the common cold are caused by different viruses. They have some of the same symptoms, but there are differences. Let's look at the common signs and symptoms of the flu versus a severe common cold to help you tell them apart.

Flu symptoms are in the left column and cold symptoms are in the right column.

- A fever or feeling chilled is a key symptom of the flu but not for a cold. Many people say they're burning up one minute and then freezing the next.
- A cough is a symptom for both the flu and a cold, but it can become severe with the flu. The flu can even lead to bronchitis and pneumonia which will increase coughing.
- A sore throat is also seen in both the flu and a cold.
- A runny or stuffy nose is very common with a cold, but it can sometimes also be seen with the flu.
- Muscle and body aches are usually seen with the flu and are often more severe. Occasionally a person with a cold may have slight body aches but not often.
- Fatigue or tiredness can be felt with the flu or a cold, but it is severe with the flu. Many people with the flu feel extreme exhaustion. A person with a cold may have some mild tiredness but nothing like what is experienced with the flu.
- A headache is common with the flu and can become severe.
- Sneezing usually only occurs with a cold, not with the flu.

So the key symptoms that are unique to the flu are:

- Fevers and chills
- More severe cough
- Severe muscle and body aches

- Severe fatigue or tiredness and
- Headache

Sometimes the symptoms are not obvious, and it is important to call someone from your healthcare team like your nurse, therapist, or doctor. Your doctor may want to run a test or order medicine if you notify them in time.

What can you do to prevent the flu?

A yearly flu shot is your best protection. Also wash your hands well and frequently and try to avoid people who are sick.

Some people are nervous to get a flu shot because of stories they have heard from family and friends. We all hear stories, but are they true? Let's fact check some of the claims people often make about the flu and flu shot.

"You can get the flu from getting the flu shot." Is this true or false?

That statement is FALSE. The vaccine takes 2 weeks to take effect. So if someone gets the shot today and presents with flu symptoms next week, they were already exposed to the flu virus prior to getting vaccinated, so the flu shot will not be able to help prevent or reduce the flu symptoms.

This is important to know so you get your flu shot earlier in the season. Getting vaccinated in October typically gives the vaccine time to start working before holiday gatherings where there will be more people around you. Many people can be carrying the flu virus without knowing it and spread it to you during those holiday gatherings. Be prepared by getting your shot early.

"I had the flu even though I got the flu shot, so it did not work." Is this true or false?

This statement is FALSE. The purpose of the vaccine is to reduce your chances of getting the flu that season or reduce the severity. A flu shot is needed every year for two reasons: 1) it's effective for 6-8 months, and 2) vaccines protect against specific strains of the flu, and each year, they change. Occasionally, the flu strain that hits the United States does not match the flu vaccine for that year. This doesn't happen very often, and most of the time, it is a perfect match.

"Antibiotics are necessary with the flu." Is this true or false?

The answer is FALSE. Antibiotics do not work against viruses. Antivirals can be ordered to reduce the length of the flu by a couple of days if started within a few days of the first

symptoms. The antiviral can also reduce the severity, especially for older people. Talk with your healthcare team member if you have other questions or concerns about the flu vaccine.

Did you know that young children, people over the age of 65, and people with weakened immune systems are at the highest risk for getting pneumonia, being hospitalized, and dying from pneumonia? Did you know that pneumonia is an infection usually caused by a bacteria or a virus in your air sacs in one or both lungs?

Pneumonia has some of the same symptoms as the flu, but there are differences. Both pneumonia and flu have fever, chills, cough, and fatigue. The cough generally gets worse with pneumonia. Some different signs of pneumonia that the flu doesn't have can include: nausea and vomiting, shortness of breath, or even some chest discomfort especially when breathing.

Sometimes the symptoms can be difficult to identify, and it is important to call someone from your healthcare team. Your doctor may want to get a chest x-ray before ordering medication.

What can you do to prevent pneumonia?

Keep your pneumonia shots up-to-date. There are many types of pneumonia. It is now recommended that you receive two different pneumonia shots – usually a year apart. These two vaccines will help prevent or reduce the severity of more than 30 types of pneumonia. If you are over 65 years of age, no booster is required at this time, but a booster would be recommended for people who get their shots before the age of 65. If you are not sure if you need a booster, ask a member of your healthcare team.

Smoking increases your risk of pneumonia and can make it worse. Try to stop smoking now before you get pneumonia. Quitting is very hard, and you will need support. People are more successful when they use a medication like a patch or gum with some support services, like talking with a trained person. Ask one of your healthcare team members to tell you more and help you get started.

Just like with the flu, wash your hands well and frequently, and try to avoid people who are sick. It is also important to keep up-to-date with your other immunizations or shots because some of those infections can turn into pneumonia. For example, the yearly flu shot can also help prevent pneumonia. Discuss other questions or concerns about the pneumonia vaccines with your healthcare team, and ask if you need any other immunizations.

Do you know that one out of three people will develop shingles in their lifetime? Do you know that your risk increases with age? Do you know that shingles is caused by the chicken pox virus?

Once you've had chicken pox, the virus stays in your body and can become active later in your life as shingles, especially for older people.

The first signs of shingles are pain, itching, and tingling that starts 1-5 days before a painful rash appears, usually on one side of the face or body. The pain can be severe. Blisters will form over the rash area which can last as long as four weeks. There are a few other symptoms that could occur including fever, chills, headache, or an upset stomach.

If you know anyone that has had shingles, they probably complained about the severe pain and the blisters.

Sometimes people initially think shingles is a type of poison, but if it is painful and is on just one side of the body, see your doctor right away. Your doctor may order an antiviral medication, treatment for the blisters, and discuss pain management.

What can you do to prevent the shingles?

The only prevention is to get the shingles shot. It is recommended for people over the age of 50. Many insurance plans cover the vaccine, but each plan is different; some will only cover it if you are 60 years or older. Ask a member of your healthcare team to help you find out. Only one shot is needed for a lifetime.

HHQI would like to thank you for taking time to learn more about ***preventing and recognizing the flu, pneumonia, and shingles***. Please discuss any questions with a member of your healthcare team.

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