

## INFLUENZA

It's that time of year again when 'at risk' patients are advised to have their flu jabs, but what is flu and how do you tell it apart from a common cold?

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection that normally occurs in late autumn to winter. Because it is a virus antibiotics have no effect on flu and it is up to your own immune system to produce antibodies that will fight and kill off the virus. Once you have had one particular strain of flu, the antibodies you made will stay in your body and prevent you from contracting that strain again. Unfortunately the flu virus has the ability to easily mutate i.e. change so much, that the antibodies you made will no longer protect you from this new strain of flu. Fortunately scientists now monitor these mutations and each year the flu vaccine that is produced will protect you against these new strains.

Influenza, like a cold, is normally caught from an already infected person by inhaling infected droplets that have been coughed or sneezed out.

### **DID YOU KNOW THAT A SNEEZE CAN TRAVEL THE LENGTH OF A BUS SO IT IS EASY TO INHALE INFECTED DROPLETS?**

However, it can also be caught by direct contact with an infected person's secretions or even handling items the infected person has handled. So if you are nursing someone with the flu don't forget to wash your hands regularly, clean surfaces and get the patient to use tissues to prevent the infection spreading and keep other people out of the infected person's room, especially if they are children or elderly.

Most healthy people will be able to fight off a bout of flu, with no ill side effects but certain groups of people are considered more 'at risk' from this nasty little virus and are so offered a vaccine each autumn to prevent them from contracting flu.

How can you tell if you have the flu and not a nasty cold? Quite simply flu starts very quickly. You can finish your evening meal at 7pm feeling fine and an hour later feel so ill, it is as much as you can do to crawl up to bed. As with a cold, you may have a runny nose and a sore throat, but you will probably also have a severe headache and raised temperature and aches in the body, particularly the legs and back. Respiratory symptoms may be mild to start with; you will develop a dry cough and sometimes a burning sensation in the upper respiratory area (chest). You may become flushed and your face in particular will be red and feel hot. It is not unusual to feel nauseous and some people particularly children will vomit. Healthy people may start to feel better after a few days but these symptoms may persist longer in some people especially at risk groups.

## TREATMENT

Unfortunately there is no **MIRACLE CURE**, you will just have to tough it out. Your GP will be unable to give you any medicines so please **DON'T** go to the surgery even if you think you may have complications. Please **PHONE THE SURGERY** and ask to speak to a doctor. This way you will protect yourself from feeling worse and all the other patients and receptionists in the waiting room from catching your flu. **STAY AT HOME**, keep in the warm, but make sure the room you are in is ventilated. Avoid exertion, ideally from when the symptoms begin until your temperature returns to normal. Most people really don't want to leave their beds for several days and this is your body's way of telling you, you need to rest – this enables your body's defence system to work flat out at defeating this nasty virus. Drink plenty of fluids, water, squash or something like Lucozade especially if you can't face eating, this will provide your body with energy to fight the virus. Even if it hurts to swallow, take little sips frequently. It is best to take plain paracetamol or aspirin (if you can take it and not for children under 16) but if you want to take some of the proprietary (i.e. named brands) products on sale for flu **BEWARE** these normally also contain either paracetamol or aspirin or **BOTH**.

Check the box carefully and DON'T EXCEED THE DAILY RECOMMENDED DOSE for either paracetamol or aspirin.

Check with your pharmacist when buying these products over the counter as to how much paracetamol or aspirin they contain. Most symptoms ease and disappear after a 2 weeks, but a cough may persist for up to 8 weeks, if it continues to bother you, now is the time to see your GP, as the flu may have weakened your immune system so that you may now have a secondary bacterial infection which can be treated with antibiotics. Feeling weak, fatigued and even weepy may persist for up to six weeks.

PREVENTION – BOOK YOUR FLU JAB – FREE FROM YOUR GP if you are in an at risk group. Available from October 1st – December 2012. It takes 10 days to become effective and you CAN'T catch the flu from it.

#### GROUPS CONSIDERED AT RISK

<u>65 Years &amp; older</u>	<u>Diabetes</u>	<u>Pregnant</u>
<u>Serious Heart Complaint</u>	<u>Chronic Liver Disease</u>	<u>Serious Kidney Disease</u>
<u>Neurological Problems</u>	<u>Weakened Immune System</u>	<u>Serious Spleen Problems</u>
<u>Carers</u>	<u>Asthma</u>	<u>COPD / Emphysema</u>

Groups offered free immunization cannot fight the virus as effectively as healthy people and may end up with more severe complications

SO DON'T DELAY BOOK YOUR FLU JAB TODAY.

#### OTHER SURGERY NEWS

From 17<sup>th</sup> September the surgery telephone lines will be open from 8.30am till 4.30pm every day except Wednesday when they are open 8.30am to 12 noon.

New Staff – we give a warm welcome to Brenda our new receptionist and Jane a new healthcare assistant. We will also soon be welcoming a new part-time GP to the team, so keep checking the surgery TV screen.

#### **YOUR PPG NEEDS YOU!**

Please think about becoming a member of the PPG, even if you can only participate online at [www.longlanesurgery.com](http://www.longlanesurgery.com) . Have a look and fill in the application form.

If you can come along to meetings so much the better, they are only once or twice every three months or so for about an hour or an hour and a half (but you do get coffee and a free biscuit). Rob, the Practice Manager doesn't bite, though he does have a slight limp at the moment as he is waiting for a hip replacement, no fast track service for him even if he does work for the Health Service.

Since the PPG started the practice has benefitted. We have a new receptionist to enable the surgery to open its telephone lines during the middle of the day and the reception area is also open for picking up prescriptions and booking appointments. We now also have late appointments on Tuesday evening and morning appointments on Saturday for those who find it difficult to get to the surgery in normal working hours. The surgery is still using a lo-call number and will review this when the contract expires. You too could make a difference to your surgery by joining the PPG group or ask at reception.

The next PPG meeting will be in October to discuss our 2012 patient survey if you want to attend please sign up online for our PPG group.