

Medical guidance notes and information

Influenza ('flu) vaccination

General information

Influenza is a highly infectious illness caused by the influenza virus. It tends to start suddenly with the following symptoms:

- fever;
- chills;
- headache;
- aching muscle;
- feeling generally unwell;
- sore throat and cough.

Flu is more than a 'bad cold'. Flu can be a nasty experience. For some vulnerable groups, flu can lead to more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia which may require hospitalisation. Sadly, a lot of older people die from flu every winter.

You are more at risk from 'flu if you suffer from the following conditions:

- chronic respiratory disease, including asthma;
- chronic heart disease;
- chronic renal disease;
- chronic liver disease;
- diabetes mellitus;
- conditions leading to immuno-suppression e.g. HIV/AIDS/Chemotherapy/high dose steroid use.

The Chief Medical Officer of England recommends the use of the 'flu vaccination for:

- those of any age with the above conditions;
- those aged 65 years and over;
- all those living in long stay residential accommodation;
- those who are the main carer for an elderly or disabled person, whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill.

What is it?

The flu vaccine contains three different strains of flu viruses. These viruses are grown in hen's eggs, then killed and purified before they are made into vaccine.

How does it work?

About a week to ten days after the vaccine is injected your body makes antibodies to the viruses. These antibodies help to protect you against any similar viruses you

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come into contact with. This protection lasts for about a year. The flu vaccine protects you against flu. *It does not cause flu.*

It will not protect you against the many other viruses that are around every winter. These viral infections resemble flu but they are generally less serious than flu.

Side effects

Flu vaccinations are very safe. The side effects are mild. People may get some soreness at the injection site (such as redness, tenderness, pain, swelling), unusual purplish patches on the skin or a hard lump. Occasionally some people may experience a slight fever, feeling generally unwell, chills, tiredness, headache, dizziness, sweating, feeling sick (nausea), vomiting, muscle pain or joint pain. Other reactions are rare.

People who are allergic to hens' eggs and egg protein and to the antibiotics Neomycin and Polymyxin should not have the flu vaccination.

Free Flu Vaccinations!

Occupational Health offers free flu vaccinations every year to TfL/LU employees at different locations throughout the company. **Remember, prevention is better than cure!**

You can reduce the risk of flu or any viral infection by looking after yourself:

- eat a healthy diet (fresh fruit, vegetables and Vitamin C);
- get enough sleep;
- have regular physical exercise. **NB:** do not exercise heavily while you have a fever.
- To prevent spreading around your cold/cough/flu:
- wash your hands with soap and water regularly and before eating and drinking;
- cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze;
- do not keep used tissues throw them in the bin;
- if you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth;
- teach your family including children these hygiene rules.

Issued - November 2006

Revised February 2011

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