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Seasonal Flu

Why have the flu jab?

Flu season 2019-2020

What is the flu?

Flu is an infectious disease that is usually experienced in the winter months in the form of an epidemic (seasonal flu) and affects a large number of people every year. **It is caused by the influenza virus**, of which there are various kinds, which can also mutate over time.

What is the seasonal flu jab?

The seasonal anti-flu vaccine, or flu jab, is a trivalent vaccine administered annually whose composition varies according to the flu strains recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The illness caused by the **A and B flu viruses** in healthy adults lasts around five days. It is worth noting the complications that can occur when people in high-risk groups are affected (diabetes, morbid obesity, immunosuppression, chronic cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases, neuropathies, pregnancy, etc.). **It is estimated that the mortality rate from flu in Spain is approximately 3,000 to 4,000 people per year.**

What are the symptoms?

All the different flu types have the same **symptoms** which are: high fever (over 38°C), cough and general malaise; it can also cause headaches, sore throat, nasal secretions, sneezing, watery eyes, muscle pain and a feeling of tiredness, forcing people to rest for a few days. **In most cases, these symptoms are mild and will ease off naturally** without the need for medicines or medical attention. However, flu does present problems in certain more vulnerable people with a **higher risk factor**.

How do you catch flu?

The flu virus is **transmitted from person to person**, mainly through the air, by means of drops of saliva and nasal secretions expelled on coughing, sneezing or speaking. These drops can also be deposited on the hands or other surfaces and from there transmitted by the hands whenever they touch the eyes, nose or mouth.

Viruses are spread by sick people, so we recommend that you stay at home while you have the flu to avoid passing it on to others.

How can I protect myself and other people?

The most effective thing you can do to protect yourself and other people is follow **good hygiene practices** which will help to reduce the transmission of the virus. **Washing your hands** frequently is the main hygiene measure. You should always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water (for 15-20 seconds), especially after coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands have not been washed recently.

If you need to cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a paper tissue and immediately after using it, throw it away. If you don't have a paper tissue to hand, cough or sneeze onto a sleeve of your clothing (in the elbow area) to avoid contaminating your hands. Clean the surfaces you touch with your hands frequently (such as door handles, switches, etc.) and air your house every day by opening the windows.

High-risk groups for which the vaccine is recommended

The edict issued every year by the Vaccination Programmes and Records of the Spanish National Health System contains the anti-flu vaccine recommendations for each season, which is approved by the Public Health Commission of the SNS. In line with these recommendations, adapted to our Autonomous Community, **the current groups are regarded as high-risk for the 2019-20 flu season:**

1. Elderly people, aged over 65, with a particular emphasis on those who live in closed institutions.

2. People under 65 who have a high risk of flu-related complications*:

- Children (from 6 months) and adults with chronic cardiovascular (excluding isolated high blood pressure), neurological or respiratory diseases, including bronchopulmonary dysplasia, cystic fibrosis and asthma.
- Children (from 6 months) and adults with diabetes mellitus, morbid obesity, chronic kidney disease, nephrotic syndrome, chronic liver disease, serious neuromuscular diseases and immunosuppression (amongst other diseases). Check with your doctor.
- Children between 6 months and 18 years of age who are on long-term treatment with acetylsalicylic acid, as a precaution against developing Reye's syndrome after a bout of flu.
- **Pregnant women** in any trimester of pregnancy.

3. People susceptible to infecting others who may have a high risk of presenting complications:

- The personnel of health centres, services and establishments, whether primary or specialist care, and public and private hospitals.
- People who work in geriatric institutions or chronic healthcare centres, especially those who are in constant contact with vulnerable people.
- Students on work experience in health centres.
- People who provide home care services for high-risk or elderly patients.
- People living in the same home (including children over 6 months of age) as other people in a high risk group due to their specific medical condition (see point 2).

4. Other groups for whom the vaccine is recommended:

- People working in essential public services (State security forces, firefighters, civil protection services, staff of penitentiaries and other centres, etc.)
- People who are directly exposed through their work to domestic poultry or pigs on poultry or pig farms, and also those who come into contact with wild birds.

* This information is not exhaustive. Please check with your GP or nurse.