

CHALLENGING FLU VACCINATION MYTHS

People who decline the inFLUenza vaccination usually do so because of a false belief they have about it. Following are some of the myths and the actual facts behind these.

1. *The vaccine gives me the flu*

FALSE. The viruses contained in the influenza vaccine are dead, so it is impossible to get the flu from the vaccine.

2. *I never get the flu, so I don't need the vaccine*

FALSE. So far you have been lucky. In saying that, 20-30 percent of people carrying the influenza virus have no symptoms, but can still pass the virus onto others.

3. *Only older people get the flu*

FALSE. Flu is highly contagious and spreads quickly from person to person through touch and through the air, so it can infect anyone – even those who are fit and healthy.

4. *I can prevent influenza or treat it by taking Echinacea, Vitamin C or homeopathic remedies*

FALSE. None of these will prevent or treat influenza, and you can't 'boost' your immune system either. Avoid the flu by being vaccinated annually and using common safety measures daily.

5. *The flu isn't that bad*

FALSE. Flu infects an estimated 780,000 Kiwis every year, making 480,000 of them sick. Officially, about 50 people a year die from it, but the true number is actually about 500. Influenza kills directly, it kills by acute secondary infections, it kills by worsening underlying diseases like heart failure, and it kills long term by increasing vascular events such as heart attacks and stroke.

6. *I am not at risk for the flu*

FALSE. If you breathe, you are at risk for influenza.

7. *I had the vaccine last year, so I do not need it this year*

FALSE. Each year new strains of influenza circulate across the world. Last year's vaccine at best provides only partial protection. Every year you need a new shot.

8. *I received the vaccine and I got the flu anyway*

FALSE. It takes about two weeks to build up immunity after receiving the vaccine, so some people may get sick with the flu within that timeframe. Also remember that there are hundreds of potential causes of a respiratory infection circulating, the vaccine only covers influenza.

9. *The flu vaccine is not safe and has not been evaluated for safety*

FALSE. The worse side effect you are likely to get from the shot is a sore arm. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than one in four million.

If you are aged 65 or over; or under 65 and have a long term health condition; or have a child under five years with a significant respiratory condition; or if you are pregnant, then you may be eligible for a free influenza vaccination. If you don't qualify, you can still have one for a small cost. **For more information, visit www.fightflu.co.nz**