Shoo Achoo!
Keeping the Colds and Flu at bay

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Colds and Flu

Colds

A cold is a respiratory infection caused by one of hundreds of possible viruses which are so widespread, it is perhaps more accurate to say that colds are caused by a decrease in immunity that allows one of the viruses to take over. These viruses are transmitted through the air and may be characterized by symptoms like sore throat, sneezing, nasal discharge headaches and coughing.

Flu

Influenza B, commonly called the flu, occurs mostly in the winter season. According to the South African Flu Web, the different predominant symptoms of flu are fever, respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sore throat, runny nose, as well as headache, muscle aches and often extreme tiredness or fatigue. Although nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can occur especially in children, these symptoms are not characteristics of flu. It is important to note that a person suffering from flu should abstain from exercise as it could cause damage to the heart.

Is sports activity influenced by flu?

Athletes who participate in team sports are more vulnerable to influenza because they are in close physical contact and share locker rooms and often water bottles. Overtraining can suppress your immune functions and increase your susceptibility to upper respiratory tract and other infections. Even a mild viral infection can be devastating due to loss of important training hours and/or compromise competition performance. If you do not like risking your training program or competition during influenza season, you should be vaccinated.

Vaccination

When one is infected with the flu virus, one soon becomes ill. The immune system of the body recognizes the virus as a "foreign enemy" and tries to protect the body by producing antibodies. These antibodies take about 2 weeks to develop. The main function of the antibodies is to bind to the flu viruses and neutralize them.

Influenza vaccination is the only way to prevent getting influenza. The vaccines have 3 virus strains and they protect against 3 strains of flu viruses, which could most likely cause influenza in the population. The vaccine is given as an injection into the upper muscle of the arm. Both your doctor and pharmacist can give you the vaccine. Solvay-Influenza.com reports that inactivated influenza vaccine is usually effective 2 weeks after vaccination as by then your body has made enough antibodies to protect you against the virus.

When Should One Be Vaccinated?

In South Africa, influenza usually occurs from about May until September according to South African Flu Web. Vaccination should therefore be given between mid March and April. It is important to note that there is no cut-off date for vaccination. While influenza activity usually peaks in RSA during June and July, outbreaks of flu can occur earlier as well as later in the season. It is never too late to get vaccinated against the influenza virus.

Why do I have to be vaccinated every year?

You need to be vaccinated every year because influenza viruses change over time. Therefore the vaccine composition is adapted every year to the human influenza viruses that are circulating throughout the world that particular year. Inactivated influenza vaccine works at least 6 months on average, which is long enough to protect you for the duration of a complete influenza season. The amount of antibodies in the body is greatest 1 or 2 months after vaccination and then gradually declines.

Side effects of vaccination

It is good to know that 95% of people vaccinated experience none or only very slight side effects. The most frequent side effect of vaccination is soreness at the vaccination site that lasts less than 2 days. These local reactions are mild and rarely interfere with the persons' ability to perform sports. Sometimes fever, malaise, muscle aches and other systemic symptoms can occur after vaccination. Allergic reactions rarely occur after influenza vaccination