

# The HARI *Perspective*

## **Gina Rocha, MPH, RN: National Influenza Week**



Sniffles and sneezes often come with the inevitable change in the weather and the start of the Flu season, which officially started in late October but peaks between December and February. During National Influenza Week, which is this week, we take the time to educate our readers on what they can do to stay healthy and prevent the spread of the Flu during these “peak months.”

Receiving your Flu shot is the most effective and important step you can take in keeping yourself, as well as those around you, healthy and flu free for the season. The holiday season is all about giving, but nobody wants to receive the flu as a present. By receiving the Flu vaccination, you are keeping those who are most susceptible to the Flu and unable to receive the vaccination from getting sick.

You can't catch the flu from the flu shot. According to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is no live virus in the Flu shot. However, the CDC points out that you can still get sick with the Flu, even if you have been vaccinated. You may be exposed to the flu before the shot or to a flu virus not included in the seasonal vaccine. Yes, you will have a sore arm for a couple of days where the shot was injected. And yes, you might experience a low-grade fever and/or muscle aches as I did when I got my Flu shot at my local pharmacy.

The Flu shot maybe free depending on your insurance and takes about two weeks to take effect and protect you. So, if you were already getting sick before even receiving the Flu shot, then it might just be a matter of bad timing if you get sick. It is for this reason that the administrator of your vaccinator will often ask if you are feeling healthy. Regardless of the vaccination's side effects, they will never be as bad as the symptoms you are likely to experience without the vaccination. Which if your case is severe enough, can be death.

According to the CDC, around 80,000 Americans died and more than 900,000 were hospitalized for the Flu or Flu-related hospitalizations during last year's Flu season. The CDC recommends that anyone six months of age or older get vaccinated. This recommendation is especially important for people who are at high risk for flu complications. This includes people who are 65 years old, young children, and people with chronic conditions such as asthma or heart disease. Individuals who care for and live with these high-risk populations should also get vaccinated.

Receiving the flu shot will best protect you and those around you from contracting the Flu this season. By getting vaccinated, you help protect yourself, family, and your patients. However, it is still important to receive plenty of sleep, stay hydrated, and most importantly, wash your hands with warm soap and water for 20 seconds, lathering the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails.

Go and get your flu shot today!

- Gina Rocha, MPH, RN, HARI Vice President of Clinical Affairs