

# Flu Shot and MG

Flu season is now upon us, but it is not too late to get the flu shot! The MGFA recently shared information regarding vaccinations, including the flu vaccine that is important to our members.

**Vaccinations, including flu vaccine:** It is generally believed that vaccinations (e.g. influenza) are safe in patients with MG (with a major caveat below). The evidence suggests that vaccine-related worsening of MG is rare and thus most MG specialists believe the benefits of immunization outweigh any small risk related to possible transient worsening of MG symptoms.

**Exception/caveat:** If you are taking immunosuppressive medication, such as Prednisone, Azathioprine or Mycophenolate, it is usually recommended that you **avoid live, attenuated** vaccines. Examples of live, attenuated vaccines include the shingles vaccine and the nasal spray form of the influenza vaccine (the influenza injection is inactivated and thus not alive, so it is much safer in immunosuppressed patients). You need to discuss this with any doctor when considering a vaccine. If you are not sure, you should ask your doctor if you are taking immunosuppressive drugs and, if so, if the vaccine is safe in that setting. It's worth noting that most vaccines are inactivated (e.g. dead), but because there are a few vaccines that are alive and attenuated (i.e. the pathogen is alive but not very virulent and thus immunizes the patient without causing the disease) and because the live, attenuated vaccines carry higher risk for those who are immunosuppressed, this technicality about vaccines is important and is always worth consideration.

**Preparing for the flu season:** The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone 6 months of age and older. They recommend this as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. While there are many different flu viruses, the flu vaccine is designed to protect against the three main flu strains that research indicates will cause the most illness during the flu season. Getting the flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available each year is always a good idea, and the protection you get from vaccination will last throughout the flu season.

In addition, you should take the everyday preventive steps such as staying away from those that are sick and washing your hands regularly to reduce the spread of germs. If you are sick with the flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading influenza to others. Keep warm, get plenty of rest and stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water and juice. The flu can last 5 to 10 days, cause coughing spells and deplete your energy, so take it slow when you do resume your usual activities.

