

MEDIA RELEASE

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FLU VACCINE NOW AVAILABLE

Vaccine for the seasonal flu will be available at the Cayman Islands Hospital, District Health Centres in Grand Cayman, Faith Hospital, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman clinic from Wednesday October 21st 2015.

Acting Director of Primary Health Care, Dr Samuel Williams Rodriguez explains this year's flu vaccine will also protect against the 2009 H1N1 pandemic flu.

The flu vaccine will be available at:

- The General Practice Clinic at the Cayman Islands Hospital, Faith Hospital in Cayman Brac and all District Health Centres, from 2:00 p.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- The Little Cayman Clinic: Residents of Little Cayman should contact the clinic to make arrangements.
- To meet the demand in the initial period, the flu shot will also be available at the Cayman Islands Hospital Atrium (next to the Pharmacy) from October 15th to October 28th 2015 from 10am – noon on weekdays. Flu Shots will also be available at CayShop 2015, October 29-31 at the Arc Cayman Bay.

The flu vaccine is FREE to all residents. No appointments are necessary, however persons should indicate to the registration officer at the clinic that they need to have the flu shot.

"We recommend that people get vaccinated as soon as possible and definitely before the peak of the flu season which ranges between December and January," Dr Williams-Rodriguez says.

Dr Williams-Rodriguez further advises that the vaccine is only effective for one season. All persons, 6 months of age and older should get the flu vaccine. It is especially important for people at high risk for complications from influenza and those who live with or care for them, be vaccinated early each year. High-risk persons include the following:

- Young children 6 months to four years of age, but especially those under two years.
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- Persons of any age with weakened immune systems and those with chronic medical conditions such as heart, kidney and lung diseases, diabetes and persons who are obese.
- People living in nursing homes and other long term care facilities.

"To minimize workplace disruption and ensure that as many persons as possible get vaccinated, I am also pleased to announce that our Public Health Department will continue our program of the onsite workplace vaccination initiative for companies with twenty or more employees wishing to have the vaccine, I wish that the companies will take up this offer", says Dr. Williams- Rodriguez "As we have to schedule the visits to worksites with current staff that have regular duties, the visits cannot be done immediately. While we offer the vaccine at no cost, we are proposing to utilize off duty staff or retired nurses to participate in the flu vaccine programme at workplaces to administer the vaccine as soon as possible for companies willing to contribute \$200 per session. Companies that do not wish to make arrangements for immediate flu vaccine coverage for their employees may get it in late November or December as the visits will be scheduled when employed staff time is available" he added.

Companies interested in the program should contact the Public Health Department at 244-2621 to register.

Flu Q & A

Why should people get vaccinated against the Flu?

Influenza ("flu") is a contagious disease. It is caused by the influenza virus, which can be spread by coughing, sneezing, or nasal secretions. Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, symptoms last only a few days. They include: • Fever • sore throat • chills • fatigue • cough • headache • muscle aches. Other illnesses can have the same symptoms and are often mistaken for influenza. An annual flu vaccine is the best way to reduce the chances that you will get flu and lessen the chance that you will transmit to others.

Will the 2015-2016 seasonal flu vaccine protect against 2009 H1N1 pandemic flu?

The 2015-2016 flu vaccine includes protection against 2009 H1N1 flu virus, Influenza A (H3N2) and Influenza B.

Who should get vaccinated?

All persons, 6 months of age and older should get the flu vaccine. It is especially important for people who are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or people who live with or care for them. High risk persons include:

1. Young children 6 months to 4 years of age, but especially those under 2 years.
2. Pregnant women
3. People 50 years of age and older
4. Persons of any age over 6 months with weakened immune systems and those with chronic medical conditions such as heart, kidney and lung diseases, diabetes and morbidly obese people with a BMI of 40 or greater.
5. People living in nursing homes and other long term care facilities.

People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, include:

- a. Health care workers
- b. Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
- c. Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

Who should not get vaccinated or wait?

The following persons should not be vaccinated without first consulting their physician:

- Children less than 6 months of age
- People who have severe allergy to chicken or chicken eggs (the flu vaccine virus is grown on hens' eggs)
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past
- People who developed Guillian-Barre' syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting a vaccine previously.
- People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated.
- Nursing mothers should inform their doctor or nurse that they are breastfeeding before taking the flu shot.

What kind of flu vaccine is available?

The "flu vaccine" is administered in the Cayman Islands by injection, usually in the arm. The vaccine is approved for use among people 6 months of age or older, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease

How does flu vaccine work?

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine. It takes up to 2 weeks for the protection to develop after the shot. Protection lasts about a year.

When should I get a flu vaccination?

The H.S.A recommends that people get their seasonal flu vaccine as soon as the vaccine becomes available. Vaccination before December is best since this timing ensures that protective antibodies are in place before flu activity is typically at its highest.

Once you get vaccinated, your body makes protective antibodies in about two weeks. However, children aged 6 months to 8 years who are being vaccinated for the first time need a second dose 4 weeks later in order to be protected.

Does flu vaccine work right away?

No. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. . However, children aged 6 months to 8 years who are being vaccinated for the first time, need a second dose 4 weeks later in order to be protected. In the meantime, you are still at risk for getting the flu. That's why it's better to get vaccinated early in the fall, before the flu season really gets under way.

Can I get the flu even though I got a flu vaccine?

Yes.

1. People may be exposed to an influenza virus shortly before getting vaccinated or during the two-week period that it takes the body to gain protection after getting vaccinated. This exposure may result in a person becoming ill with flu before the vaccine begins to protect them.
2. People may become ill from other (non-flu) viruses that circulate during the flu season, which can also cause flu-like symptoms (such as rhinovirus).
3. A person may be exposed to an influenza virus that is not included in the seasonal flu vaccine as there are many different influenza viruses.
4. Unfortunately, some people can remain unprotected from flu despite getting the vaccine. This is more likely to occur among people that have weakened immune systems. However, even among people with weakened immune systems, the flu vaccine can still help prevent influenza complications.

Why do I need to get vaccinated against the flu every year?

The immunity (natural protection that develops against a disease after a person has had that disease) that is built up from having the flu caused by one virus strain doesn't always provide protection when a new strain is circulating. Secondly, a vaccine made against flu viruses circulating last year may not protect against the newer viruses. That is why the influenza vaccine is updated to include current viruses every year.

Can the flu shot give me the flu?

No, a flu shot cannot cause flu illness. The viruses contained in flu shots are inactivated (killed), which means they cannot cause infection.

What are the risks from getting a flu shot?

The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. The risk of a flu shot causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small. However, a vaccine, like any medicine, may rarely cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. Almost all people who get influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it.

What are the side effects that could occur?

Common problems: • soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given, hoarseness, sore, red or itchy eyes, cough, fever, aches. If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and last 1-2 days.

Uncommon and Rare problems: Itching, hives, rash, convulsions, encephalomyelitis (inflammation of brain & spinal cord and Guillian –Barre syndrome (1-2 cases per million people vaccinated). Life-threatening allergic reactions from vaccines are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot.

What should I do if I have an uncommon or rare side effect to influenza vaccine?

- Seek medical attention right away.
- Tell your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when you got the flu shot.

For more information please contact:

Public Health Clinic - 244-2648

The General Practice Unit - 244-2800

Faith Hospital - 948-2243

Little Cayman Clinic - 948-0114

The District Health Centres -

- East End947-7440
- North Side947-9525
- West Bay949-3439
- Bodden Town947-2299

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