Flu Season is Here

It might have taken longer to arrive than last year, but flu season has officially arrived for 2018-2019. Two states, Colorado and Georgia, are currently reporting high levels of influenza-like illnesses (ILI). The average length of flu season is 16 weeks, so expect to be inundated with flu shot notifications until April. The severity of the season remains to be seen, although seven deaths of children due to flu complications have been reported thus far.

This and Last Year

The 2017-2018 flu season was a particularly difficult one. According to the Centers for Disease Control, it officially lasted for a longer than usual 19 weeks and was the first flu season to be classified as high severity among all age groups. Last year was also notable for the number of children who died from the flu, the highest number of pediatric deaths registered during a normal flu season.

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Although the CDC doesn't have final numbers, the flu shot in 2017-2018 is estimated to be 40 percent effective. But that percentage changes based on the strain of flu. Last year's flu shot was the most powerful against the H1N1 strain of influenza A, with a 65 percent effectiveness rate. The flu shot had a 49 percent effectiveness against Influenza B and a 25 percent effectiveness versus H3N2. Yet the flu shot was the least effective against the most dominant flu strain of the season, H3N2.

A study from Rice University predicts that the flu shot will be 19 percent effective this year. According to numbers from the CDC, that percentage of effectiveness would be the lowest

the flu shot has been since 2014-2015. As of right now, influenza A(H1N1) is the most prevalent flu strain.

The Flu Shot

The CDC heavily recommends the flu shot. As the season continues, flu vaccine reminders will follow you everywhere you go, pushing the idea that even a slightly reduced chance of getting the flu is worth the physical pain, headaches, diarrhea, loss of appetite, fatigue, and other potential vaccine side effects.

The flu shot might not even afford you full protection for a full month, let alone through the entire flu season. A study published in Clinical Infectious Diseases in September 2018 found that the likelihood of getting the flu even after vaccination increases by 16 percent every 28 day period after the initial shot. According to the authors of the study,

> *Although our results suggest that some number of influenza cases may be averted by delaying vaccination, any changes in recommendations regarding the timing of vaccination should be approached with caution."*

In addition to timing your flu shot to get the full protection, you also have to contend with the period of time after vaccination when the flu shot protection hasn't kicked in. The CDC cautions that it takes two weeks for the flu shot to provide full protection. If the CDC and this study are accurate, there is a two week period where the individual who received the vaccine is fully protected. Worth it?

Related: *How To Heal Your Gut*

All Risk…Any Reward?

Flu vaccine inserts for popularly used products like Afluria,

Fluzone, Fluarix, and Fluvirin report that the most commonly experienced adverse reaction is pain at the injection site. Manufacturers also mention headaches, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and fatigue. Serious side effects can also occur, like brain inflammation, convulsions, Bell's palsy, paralysis of limbs, neuropathy, shock, asthma, wheezing, Guillain-Barre Syndrome, and other respiratory issues.

The flu is no laughing matter, but there are better, less harmful alternatives to the flu shot. Check out this article for some great ideas. Do your self and your immune system a favor. Don't damage it with the flu shot this year.

Sources:

- *CDC reports high flu virus activity* – ABC
- *Influenza Vaccine – A Comprehensive Overview of the Potential Dangers and Effectiveness of the Flu Shot* – Organic Lifestyle Magazine
- *Study: Flu vaccine protection starts to wane within weeks* – CIDRAP
- *Rice Study Predicts 19 Percent Efficacy for 2018-2019 Influenza Vaccine* – The Vaccine Reaction
- *Summary of the 2017-2018 Influenza Season* – CDC.gov