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PAC Chairs Speak

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A NEWSLETTER FOR PATIENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Winter 2011

Should I Get the Flu Shot?

Influenza (often called the flu), can affect anyone, but as an adult with a chronic illness such as kidney failure, you are at higher risk of catching the flu. People with health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, liver disorders, chronic lung disease (including asthma), cancer and chronic kidney disease (CKD), including people on dialysis are more susceptible of catching the flu and are at risk of complications related to the flu. Complications of flu may include bacterial pneumonia, ear infection, sinus infection, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions.

Complications of the flu are responsible for more than 200,000 people hospitalized in the United States every year and 36,000 people die from seasonal flu complications.

Each year a new flu vaccine is developed based on the different strains and types of flu viruses. The 2010-2011 flu vaccines will protect you against the latest seasonal flu strains, in addition to the H1N1 (swine flu) virus. If a person were to receive a flu shot one time, for example as with the polio vaccine, they would not be protected from the latest strains causing the flu. That's why it is important to receive the flu vaccine every year.

In 2007 approximately, 59% of End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) patients received the flu vaccine, which is below the Healthy People 2010 target goal of 90%. This is a major concern, considering ESRD patients have an increased risk of getting the flu, acquiring complications and becoming hospitalized.

What are some symptoms of the flu?

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy Nose
- Muscle or Body Aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue

How is the flu spread?

The flu virus is spread easily from person to person by coughing and sneezing. It is important to cover your nose and mouth at all times. You can also pick up the virus from shaking hands, close contact and infected surfaces for example door knobs or telephones. Make sure you wash your hands frequently with soap and water (bacterial hand sanitizer if water is not available) and avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes.

ESRD Network PAC Chairpersons

Albany	Kathe LeBeau
Bronx	Vivian Davis, Lorraine Langdon
Brooklyn	Wendy Rivers, Warren Edmonds
Buffalo	Shane Deitz, Frank Ireland
Hudson Valley	open
Manhattan/Staten Island.....	Larry Wilson
Nassau County.....	Michael Young
Queens.....	Monica Richter, Elizabeth Credle
Rochester	open
Suffolk	Pete Savage
Syracuse	Sue Burns, Richard Atkinson

These PAC Chairpersons oversee the activities of the PAC Representatives in local facilities. PAC Chairs are happy to come out (schedule permitting) to Patient Meetings as guest speakers.

If you would like a PAC Chairperson to be the guest speaker at your next meeting, contact the Network Patient Services Coordinator, Aaron Battle at (800) 238-ESRD (3773) ext. 414.

Contact the Network at least one month before the meeting to allow time to work out schedules.

It is important that you:

1. Avoid being in close contact with sick people.
2. Remind family members, especially children, to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or to cough into their arms (not their hands). Consider carrying plastic baggies to hold tissues until you can dispose of them.
3. Ask your dialysis unit about the proper and most effective way to use surgical masks, determine which masks you should use, and let facility staff show you how to use them.
4. Wash and spray surfaces with a disinfectant daily to help prevent the spread of the flu.

A yearly flu shot is your best defense against the flu, but only about half of people with kidney failure get one.

When does the flu season start?

The flu season can start as early as October and can last well into the winter months; peak activity is usually seen in January or later.

When should I get vaccinated?

Flu vaccination should begin in September or as soon as the vaccine is available and continue into December, January and beyond. It takes about 2 weeks for a flu shot to help you fight off the flu. Medicare pays for flu shots.

Where can I get the flu shot?

The flu shot is offered at the dialysis center, your primary care physician's office, flu clinics, senior centers and at some pharmacies. It is important to report back to your dialysis facility if you receive the flu shot elsewhere, so that they will place the information in your medical record.

Are there any side effects from the flu vaccine?

The viruses in the flu shot are killed, so you **cannot** get the flu from the flu shot. Some minor side effects are:

- Soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever
- Aches

What should I do if I have symptoms of the flu?

Alert your doctor or nurse immediately, your doctor may prescribe medications to treat the flu and tell you what you need to do.

For the reasons listed above, we as patients, family members and health care workers should take the initiative and receive the flu shot annually to protect ourselves from getting the flu, as well as preventing the spread of the flu to others.

Flu resources

<http://www.ipro.org/index/influenza-vaccination-project>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

<http://www.immunize.org/>