



## Section 2: Tool

# Influenza Vaccination: Fiction vs Fact

## Influenza Vaccination: Fiction vs Fact

**Fiction:** A flu shot causes the flu.

**Fact:** The vaccine is not made from live flu virus and, therefore, cannot infect you. The injection may cause some irritation, soreness or redness, but you won't get the flu.

**Fiction:** The flu is not a serious disease.

**Fact:** Each year, approximately 226,000 people in the United States are hospitalized for influenza or complications resulting from it. About 36,000 people die from flu and its complications, mostly people older than 65 years of age.<sup>1</sup> Children younger than of 2 years of age are also among the most frequent victims of flu.

**Fiction:** The flu vaccine is often not effective.

**Fact:** When the flu vaccine is well matched with the circulating viruses, its effectiveness ranges between 70% to 90%.<sup>2,3</sup> Even in years when the vaccine is not well matched with the virus, it still gives some protection. If you get the flu, it may not be as severe.

**Fiction:** Only the elderly need to get a flu shot.

**Fact:** The elderly, small children, and people with chronic conditions like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease are more vulnerable to flu infection, but anyone can transmit the virus before experiencing its symptoms. If you get a flu shot, you are less likely to transmit the flu to someone else, including the long-term care residents with whom you work.

**Fiction:** You have to be vaccinated before December.

**Fact:** The flu season usually begins in late October and lasts until mid-April. It takes about two weeks for your body to develop immunity to the flu once you are vaccinated. You can still get protection from the vaccine by getting a flu shot any time during flu season.

**Fiction:** I have a strong immune system, so I am willing to risk it.

**Fact:** The flu virus changes almost every year, so even if you were immune one year, you may not be the next year. Besides, it's not all about you. If you protect yourself with a flu shot, you won't transmit it to others.

**Fiction:** If I get the flu, I can always take an antibiotic.

**Fact:** The flu is a virus. Antibiotics only work against bacteria and, therefore, will not help treat the flu.

**Fiction:** If I get a flu shot, I won't get the flu.

**Fact:** Flu shots are rarely, if at all, 100% effective. Variables that influence efficacy include the closeness of the match between the circulating virus and the virus strains in the vaccine, and patient characteristics such as age and immune system status.

**Fiction:** The symptoms of flu look the same in everyone.

**Fact:** The primary symptoms of flu occur suddenly and usually include fever and cough among other things. These may vary, however, from mild to moderate to severe depending on several factors including the age of the patient, the type (A or B) and strain of the flu virus, and if the patient has any complications such as diabetes, CHF, or COPD.

**The Bottom Line Fact:** By getting an annual flu shot, you are not only protecting yourself from the flu, but you are also protecting your family, the residents you serve, and others with whom you come in contact.

#### References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention and control of influenza. Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2007;56(RR-6):1-54. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5606.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5606.pdf). Accessed August 2, 2007.
2. Shugarman L, Hales C, Setodji C et al. The influence of staff and resident immunization rates on influenza-like illness outbreaks in nursing homes. *J Am Med Dir Assoc.* 2006;7:562-567.
3. Jefferson T, Rivetti A, Rudin M, Di Pietrantonj C, Demicheli V. Efficacy and effectiveness of influenza vaccines in elderly people: A systematic review. *Lancet.* 2005;366(9492):1165-1174.