

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness Show where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson, your host and my guest today is Brittany Nelson. She's the Employee Health Coordinator at Lake Region Healthcare and at Prairie Ridge Hospital and Health Services and she is here to help us get a handle on the 2019-2020 influenza season and talk about getting our flu shots. Good morning, Brittany.

Brittany Nelson: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: Well, it happens every year, right? All of a sudden it's fall and all of a sudden you're seeing all the information out about getting your flu shot and this year is no exception. It kind of snuck up on us, but as we're looking ahead to the flu season, what do we know about it so far? I know a lot of research goes into it.

Brittany Nelson: Right? So so far for the 2010 flu season, we don't have much data out there. What we do know is flu seasons are often unpredictable. We do know that the flu spreads each year and a typical flu season can start as early as October and can last as late as May. Last year, flu activity began to increase in November. We did see it peak in mid-February and then it did return to below baseline in April. It did last 21 weeks and it made it the longest flu season in 10 years.

Katie Johnson: Oh, my gosh. Did that have anything to do with it being the longest winter in Minnesota history?

Brittany Nelson: I think that had a lot to do with it.

Katie Johnson: I think so too.

Brittany Nelson: It was painful for all.

Katie Johnson: It was. So when we talk about influenza and getting your flu shot, just why is it that the flu shot is so important?

Brittany Nelson: The flu can be very serious, especially for those that are very young, the elderly and those with chronic health conditions. The symptoms commonly include a high fever, body aches and extreme fatigue. It can last for days and usually the symptoms last for weeks. This often causes a strain on your immune system and then secondary infections like pneumonia can develop, and these can be fatal for high-risk groups. Yep. So the flu shot is so important because it is your best defense against the flu. By getting the flu shot, you're protecting yourself and others from the flu. At Lake Region and Prairie Ridge, we strive to attain a high vaccination rate for all of our healthcare workers. That's to protect our vulnerable patient population that we come in contact with. We encourage all of our staff to protect themselves and we also care about those that we are caring for.

Katie Johnson: It really does double duty. It's really not just for you, it's also for the people around you, and I think it's so important to remember that. That it's pretty easy to say, "Oh, I don't really need it. I'm a strong, healthy adult and if I come down with influenza, it's not a big deal." But think about the people around you, older adults, younger children, people with a compromised immune system. You're not just thinking about yourself when you're thinking about that decision. What about the guidelines as far as who needs a flu shot or maybe who doesn't or shouldn't get a flu shot?

Brittany Nelson: Sure. So all age groups are susceptible to influenza, therefore, the CDC recommends a yearly flu shot for everyone six months of age and older. This is also especially important for those high-risk groups that are at risk of flu-related complication. Those children that are younger than age five, pregnant women, people 65 years and older and those with chronic health conditions. So if you are caring for or come in contact with any of those high-risk groups is equally as important that you receive your annual flu vaccine.

Katie Johnson: So those children under six months of age, I think that's an especially important one to think about. If you have any reason to be in contact with those children, you're really putting them at higher risk if you have not gotten your flu vaccine.

Brittany Nelson: Right, so parents, grandparents, it's really important that you're getting out there to get your flu shot this year and every year.

Katie Johnson: Yeah. I've heard there's something called high-dose shots or shots that are made with an adjuvant that are for older people. When are those recommended and are those something that we offer here at Lake Region Healthcare and Prairie Ridge?

Brittany Nelson: Yes, we do offer that vaccine. That is for people 65 years and older. Those people are at a greater risk of flu complications, so it's especially important for this group to receive the flu shot. Older people having lower immune response after flu vaccination compared to younger adults, therefore, the high-dose flu vaccine is recommended. This particular vaccine contains four times the amount of antigen as a regular flu shot, and that's to help build up a stronger immune reaction after you receive the injection.

Katie Johnson: So it's kind of supercharged?

Brittany Nelson: Right.

Katie Johnson: Nice.

Brittany Nelson: That's the supercharged vaccine.

Katie Johnson: How about this year's flu shot availability? I know that we're starting the flu shot clinics now in the next few days, but how long is it available and do we ever run the risk of running out of flu vaccine?

Brittany Nelson: Sure it can happen. Some years we've run into a little bit of a shortage. The flu shot right now is currently available and we anticipate it to be available throughout the flu season. According to the CDC, there will be plenty of flu vaccine available this year. I've seen it advertised and available at clinics, pharmacies and some other retailers in our area as well.

Katie Johnson: Yeah. Sometimes we hear the resistance to the flu shot having to do with potential side effects. What are the side effects or the potential side effects of getting a flu shot?

Brittany Nelson: Sure. The most typical reaction is some soreness at the injection site. That's not uncommon. People also report some aching, a low-grade fever and some mild flu-like symptoms. These symptoms are mild, like I said, compared to the actual flu that you would experience if you were to come down with it.

Katie Johnson: I've heard that before. I'm not going to get one because it makes me sick anyway, but I don't know if people understand the difference in the severity of what actual influenza is like and that this might be a really small price to pay.

Brittany Nelson: Right, exactly. Yep. Just a small price to pay to try to prevent that illness from actually occurring. It's your body's building up those antibodies to protect you. It's a normal immune response that you're experiencing after vaccination.

Katie Johnson: So that's one common myth. Any other myths you'd like to dispel about the shot itself or about influenza in general?

Brittany Nelson: Sure. The most common one that I hear is the flu shot gives people the flu, like we just discussed. The flu vaccine is made from a dead inactivated virus, so it can't infect you. The vaccine is made from one of two ways. The flu vaccine contains viruses that have been inactivated and aren't infectious or they're made with no flu viruses at all. Another one that I often hear is, "I still got sick after getting the flu shot. It didn't work." There're a few reasons you could still get sick.

One of those may be that you came down with another type of respiratory illness such as the common cold. Another one is you may have been exposed to the flu virus shortly before getting vaccinated or during that two week period after vaccination. It does take about two weeks for the body to develop that immune protection after you're vaccinated. So if you were to come in contact with it during that time, you could still get infected with that. And the flu vaccine can vary in effectiveness and some people who are vaccinated still can get sick. However, the severity and the duration of the illness might be lessened.

Katie Johnson: And as I understand it, the flu shot is kind of a guess at which strains might be out there. I suppose it's entirely possible you get a different strain-

Brittany Nelson: Correct.

Katie Johnson: ... if you become ill as well.

Brittany Nelson: Yes, that's correct. They do research on the viruses that are circulating and they try to find the best match for the upcoming flu season.

Katie Johnson: Right. Another one I think that I hear often is that people say they got the flu anyway, but really what they got was a stomach virus.

Brittany Nelson: Right, right.

Katie Johnson: And that's not the same thing, right?

Brittany Nelson: It's not. No. So the flu can be a couple of different things. So some people, when they say they have the flu, they have the gastrointestinal bug or having vomiting, diarrhea. This is not that type of flu. This is the respiratory flu that we're protecting against. So the severe body aches, the high fever, the general just feeling ill and under the weather, that's the one that we're talking about.

Katie Johnson: Right, I'd like them to come up with a shot to prevent me from getting the stomach one if they could.

Brittany Nelson: Right, yes, me too, for all of my family.

Katie Johnson: Exactly. What about things besides the flu shot? We always say this is kind of your first line of defense against influenza, but there are other things we can do to protect ourselves and those around us from the flu as well. Let's just remind people of those other good preventative practices.

Brittany Nelson: Sure, yeah. You can take everyday steps to prevent the flu and to prevent the spread of germs. So, in general, if you're sick try to limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them. The CDC does recommend that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. Make sure to wash your hands often and encourage your children when they come home from school or from daycare to wash their hands because there's lots of sharing of germ that those areas. Try to avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs can spread easily that way. Clean and disinfect your surfaces and objects that you come in contact with frequently. So at home, your bathrooms, your doorknobs, so those types of things. At work, your workstations, keyboards, phones, that's a good idea and just some ways to try to reduce your chances of getting sick. However, the flu vaccine is still your best protection.

- Katie Johnson: Right, right. We mentioned that Lake Region Healthcare and Prairie Ridge have some convenient flu shot clinics. Let's talk a little bit about how those are offered and how they work to help make it easy as possible for people to get their flu shots.
- Brittany Nelson: Right. First of all, main campus will be offering, they're drop-in flu clinics starting Monday, October 7th from five to 7:00 PM at our main clinic here. We will also have flu shot opportunities at our outreach clinics in Battle Lake, Ashby and Barnesville and all Prairie Ridge clinics will have flu shot opportunities starting tomorrow, October 2nd.
- Katie Johnson: Right, so these dates, there's several of them at all of the Lake Region and Prairie Ridge communities. There are events on Facebook for them. They're all on the websites and hopefully plenty of places where you can get that information. You can always call and ask us as well, 736-8000 is the main switchboard at Lake Region Healthcare and they can connect you with that information as well. Brittany, anything else you'd like our listeners to know as we kind of brace ourselves for the influenza season?
- Brittany Nelson: I don't think so. The main thing is just to educate yourself and get your flu shot just to protect yourself and your loved ones and those you come in contact with.
- Katie Johnson: That is the message and we hope to see you at our flu shot clinics. Again, the first one coming up at Prairie Ridge in Morris yet this week and starting in Fergus Falls on next Monday. We've got some evening hours, Saturday hours and daytime hours at almost all of the locations to help accommodate your schedule. Brittany, thank you for joining me today. Brittany Nelson, our Employee Health Coordinator at Lake Region Healthcare and Prairie Ridge Hospital and Health Services. My guest today on Apple a Day. Brittany and Katie remind you, there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.