

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness program where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson and my guest today is Dr. Kunal Kaushik. He is a pediatrician here at Lake Region Healthcare and is here to talk with us about the upcoming influenza season. Good morning, Dr. Kaushik.

Dr. Kaushik: Hi, good morning, Katie. Thanks for having me here.

Katie Johnson: Thanks for joining me. We are at that time of year where influenza becomes a topic of conversation. And the flu shot becomes a topic of our promotional efforts to try to help protect our community, protect the people we care for from coming down with this really what can be a deadly disease. Why is it important? I think that there are some people who have a perception that it's really not that effective anyway so why is it really that important? Why do we spend so much time encouraging the public to get the flu shot?

Dr. Kaushik: Yeah, that's a very important and reasonable question. So flu actually can be a pretty serious disease but [inaudible 00:01:10] amongst young kids, older people, and people with certain chronic heart conditions like asthma, heart disease, and diabetes. Any flu infection can carry a risk of serious complications, hospitalizations, or even death, and that can happen even to healthy kids and adults.

Dr. Kaushik: A CDC study basically looked at data from 2010 2014 and it found that the flu vaccines reduced the risk of flu-associated death by half amongst kids with underlying high-risk medical conditions, and by nearly two-thirds amongst healthy children. And unfortunately, last year during last season since 2014, we saw the highest number of deaths amongst children due to flu.

Dr. Kaushik: Another data that I could find from the CDC website was that until early November 2017 last year, only about two out of every five people six months and older in the U.S. had received a flu shot. So if you get vaccinated, you protect yourself but you also protect people around you, your loved ones who may be more vulnerable to serious infections. For example, babies, like the young children and older adults and people with certain chronic health conditions. So that's why a thing like the immunization is so important.

Katie Johnson: I think that's a good reminder that getting the flu shot isn't just about you.

Dr. Kaushik: Yes.

Katie Johnson: It's about the people around you and especially those who are at high risk. What are the guidelines as far as who needs a flu shot and who maybe doesn't or shouldn't get a flu shot.

Dr. Kaushik: So I'll start with who doesn't need one or shouldn't get one. Children younger than six months like they are too young to get the flu shot, and people with

severe allergies to the flu shot or any ingredient in the flu shot shouldn't get the flu shot. If you are uncertain, it's best to talk to your healthcare provider. So technically, anyone who's like more than six months unless until indicated otherwise, should get it.

Katie Johnson: So pretty much everybody, right, over six months.

Dr. Kaushik: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Katie Johnson: What about high-dose flu shots or shots made with adjuvant for older people. I did just a little bit of reading about those. When are they necessary and is that something that we provide here at Lake Region Healthcare?

Dr. Kaushik: Yeah. So there's some evidence that immunity after getting vaccinated with the flu shot may decline more quickly in older people.

Katie Johnson: Okay.

Dr. Kaushik: So in such a condition, we have like a couple of options you already mentioned, one of them is using a high-dose vaccine that is specifically designed for people 65 or older. So because the vaccine has a greater amount of antigen, it induces stronger immunity.

Katie Johnson: Okay.

Dr. Kaushik: Lake Region Healthcare has the flu zone high-dose vaccine for people who are more than 65.

Katie Johnson: Okay. And is that the case where you should ask your provider if that makes sense for you?

Dr. Kaushik: Sure, yeah.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. So this years' flu shot, when will it be available and also, how long into the season. I know some people maybe have a perception that maybe once it's January, it's too late to get a flu shot. But what's kind of the window of time?

Dr. Kaushik: Technically speaking, it's never too late because you, whenever you get vaccinated, you'll still be protected. But this year's flu shot is already at [inaudible 00:04:59]. The hospital has it. And primary care officers and other walk-in clinics are going to get it by this week.

Katie Johnson: Okay. So we will talk about those dates of our public flu shot clinics. But if you came in today, had an appointment, you could ask for the flu shot today [crosstalk 00:05:18].

Dr. Kaushik: Yeah. So for now, you need to get an appointment with your provider to get the flu shot and because the hospital is actually setting up a flu shot clinics. So till those clinics are running, you need an appointment. But after that, I think you can just walk in.

Katie Johnson: All right. Perfect. Let's talk a little bit more about the flu shot itself. Are there any side effects to the flu shot? I think there might be some perceptions that there are side effect that aren't real.

Dr. Kaushik: Sure, yeah.

Katie Johnson: Some myths that maybe we could uncover.

Dr. Kaushik: Yeah. Like any other medicine, like the flu shot too has common side effects. You can have soreness, some redness, or swelling from the shot where you get it. You can have some headache, mild fever, nausea, muscle ache. But most of these symptoms are pretty mild compared to what you have when you actually have the flu disease. Like I would follow up on that question and just mention any myths about the flu shots that you would like to talk about. So there is a common perception that the flu vaccine can give you the flu. It's not true because the injectable flu vaccine that's generally used, that's been used commonly is a killed virus so you can't have the flu with a killed virus. And even if someone was to use the inhaled flu vaccine, that's a weakened virus and that's designed only to multiply in the nose where the temperature is low. It's cannot survive in the lungs where the temperature is higher.

Dr. Kaushik: And there are a number of flu viruses apart from these four strains and there are millions of other viruses practically that can cause similar illnesses. So obviously, the flu vaccine cannot prevent you from each and every illness due to these viruses. Another I would say the myth is like about the preservative and you're no Thimerosal present in the flu vaccine, like they are basically used to prevent any contamination of the vaccine and they have a record of being very safe.

Katie Johnson: Okay.

Dr. Kaushik: Yeah.

Katie Johnson: Good, thanks for that information. How about things besides the flu shot that we can do. Like you said, the flu shot can't protect 100% against every strain of influenza. So it's really important that we remember that's just one thing that we do to help keep influenza at bay. There're a lot of other things that are just kind of common sense but a good time to remind people.

Dr. Kaushik: Sure. Like yeah, so the most important thing would be maintaining a healthy lifestyle, eating healthy, exercising, getting seven to nine hours of sleep. And of course, do not forget the flu prevention basics, wash your hands regularly, cover

your coughs and sneezes, disinfect surfaces, and stay home if you have got a fever. Try to stay away from sick people and wash your hands to reduce the spread of germs.

Dr. Kaushik: And in case, unfortunately, you end up having the flu, if you are in that window period, you can go to your provider and get medicines for it.

Katie Johnson: Right. Right. So we mentioned that Lake Region Healthcare does schedule some public flu shot clinics to help make it easy and convenient for our patients. Let's walk through when those dates and times are coming up and remind people you don't need to grab a pen and get all these right now. We'll have them posted on our website. But just to give folks an idea that we have several dates, times, and locations for people to just do kind of a walk-in flu shot clinic.

Dr. Kaushik: Yeah. Lake Region Healthcare take the flu season and the flu vaccine and all thing very seriously. So that's why we have flu shot clinics set up in the main clinic and other outreach centers. So at the Fergus Falls flu shot clinic, the dates for the vaccination would be October 1st, 5:00 to 8:00, and October 11th, 8:00 to 5:00 p.m., October 13th, October 16th. And we have October 8th for the [Ashby 00:09:41] flu shot clinic and 4th for the [inaudible 00:09:44] flu shot clinic. Yeah, the [Barnsbe 00:09:47] flu shot clinic dates are October 3rd and October 10th. And obviously, people living in those areas can directly call the clinic, and you know, as in the dates of those vaccination dates.

Katie Johnson: Exactly. And like I said, we'll also have those posted on our website, lrhc.org, and create some Facebook events too. If you're one of those people that likes to use Facebook as your calendar manager, we'll let you go to Facebook and sign up for those flu shot clinics as well. But again, there, drop in. Just walk in any time and on those flu shot clinic dates, and we'll get you in and out quickly and even give you a sticker to show that you're a flu fighter along with the rest of us.

Dr. Kaushik: Or a sucker.

Katie Johnson: Right, right. Anything else you want to add today, Dr. Kaushik?

Dr. Kaushik: No, that would be all.

Katie Johnson: All right. Well, thank you so much for sharing your background and perspective and great information with us about the 2018/2019 influenza season and why it's important for all of us and particularly for the people we love to become flu fighters, get the influenza vaccine and help protect our community from influenza this year. Dr. Kunal Kaushik, pediatrician at Lake Region Healthcare, my guest today on Apple a Day. Dr. Kaushik and I remind you, there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.