

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment where we offer news and information you can use to live a healthier lifestyle. This is Katie Johnson, and my guest today is Dr. Mark Vukonich in the family practice department at Lake Region Healthcare. He's here to talk to about the dreaded flu season. We have to admit that that season is upon us, and we're talking about immunization and creating a community immunity this year.

Thank you for joining me, Dr. Vukonich.

Dr. Vukonich: Thanks for having me.

Katie Johnson: Let's start out by talking about what we know about the 2016-2017 flu season so far.

Dr. Vukonich: As most people are probably aware, the flu season usually can start as early as October, so we will start our vaccination very shortly. For this flu season, the vaccines that we're providing cover the different strains of the virus that we're seeing around the globe. Most flu vaccines this year are going to contain a couple components to look at and target influenza A, and also at least one to target influenza B.

There are a couple new things this year that people should be aware of. The first is that only injectable flu shots are being recommended this year. If you got the flu mist other years, I'm sorry, but you're out of luck. Other updates, again, like I talked about, the flu vaccines are always updated to better match the circulating viruses. That's nothing that the public needs to be aware of, but we do update those every year.

Katie Johnson: The important piece of that is to remember that because you got the flu shot last year doesn't mean you need it this year, right? It's something that's new every year.

Dr. Vukonich: Right, exactly.

Katie Johnson: Why are flu shots so important? Why do we continue to have this campaign to get as many people as possible immunized every influenza season?

Dr. Vukonich: Flu shots are important because influenza can be a very serious illness. For anyone who's had it before, common symptoms are high fever, muscle aches, extreme fatigue, and really not feeling good at all. Oftentimes you have to miss work. For certain segments of the population, especially the young children and the elderly, flu can be even a life-threatening illness.

Katie Johnson: It really is a serious illness, and everyone doing their part makes a difference towards those vulnerable populations. Sometimes it's not so much about protecting yourself as it is about protecting those around you who are vulnerable.

Let's talk about what the guidelines are, as far as who needs a flu shot.

Dr. Vukonich: Same as last year, we recommend as the CDC recommends, everyone six months and older getting a flu shot. We like to have that happen by the end of October because the flu season can be unpredictable.

Katie Johnson: How about anyone who shouldn't get a flu shot?

Dr. Vukonich: There's a very small segment of the population who shouldn't get a flu shot, and that mainly covers those who have an extreme egg allergy. This year, the guidelines for that have changed a little bit. The change is that people who only are severely allergic to eggs, as defined by having not only hives but also breathing problems and needing injectable epinephrine, are the ones that can't have it. If you do have an egg allergy and only have a mild rash or hives, you still can get the flu vaccine this year. I always recommend, if you have any questions, check with your doctor.

Katie Johnson: Definitely good advice. Now, you mentioned in your first comments that the flu mist is not an option this year. It's not being recommended by the CDC and we won't be making that available. Can you explain why that decision was made?

Dr. Vukonich: When the CDC looked at the data from last year, they found that the flu mist did have a slightly higher rate of adverse side effects. More muscle aches and that kind of thing. It was also found to be not quite as effective as the injectable form. That's why they are no longer recommending we do the mist this year.

Katie Johnson: More effective if we go with the shot, and you mentioned side effects. Are there any side effects that are typical with a flu shot?

Dr. Vukonich: Side effects are possible with any immunization, and that's true with the flu shot as well. Usually those side effects will show up within a day or two of the shot and they last a brief amount of time, so two to three days. Common side effects: muscle aches, fever, cough, headache, fatigue. Again, these tend to be minor in compared to getting the flu. They are far better tolerated and last less long in duration.

Katie Johnson: What about myths? I think there are maybe lots of myths about the flu shot. Any that you'd like to focus on trying to dispel this morning for our listeners?

Dr. Vukonich: I think the biggest myth that I certainly hear as a physician is that the flu shots cause the flu. Flu shots do not cause the flu. What many people I think perceive as the flu are the muscle aches and soreness and fatigue that is associated with the common side effects with it. If I can give any reassurance today, it would be that you will not get the flu from getting the flu shot.

Katie Johnson: How about anything else you'd like to add as we enter the flu season and really want to rally the entire community to help us band together for this community of

immunity that, as we said, really can impact especially those most vulnerable?

Dr. Vukonich: I would say that if you're on the fence right now about getting the flu shot, think about those you interact with. Your coworkers, young children in your family, older folks. Even if you get the flu, you can pass it to others who may not be able to be immunized. Not only are you protecting yourself, but you're also protecting our community and your family.

Katie Johnson: That is so true. With that, we'd be remiss if we didn't mention that we do have several flu shot clinics to try and make it very convenient for our listeners to come in without an appointment. Just walk into the flu shot clinic with your family, and all get immunized quickly and easily.

They're going to start on September 28th, and our Barnesville Clinic is the first one. That will be all day Wednesday the 28th, from 8:30 to 4:30 in Barnesville. The first one in Fergus Falls will be the next day, Thursday the 29th, from 8:00 to 5:00. Then there are several clinics scheduled in Fergus Falls, in Barnesville, in Ashby, and at the Battle Lake Clinic. We've even added evening and Saturday hours to our flu shot schedule this year, so check those out on our [website at this link](#), or give us a call at the clinic, (218) 739-2221.

Something else that's different this year, the past few years we've had the flu shot clinics at the Cancer Center. Now with our nice, new clinic we can have them in the new main clinic building. That's where our flu shot clinics in Fergus Falls will be held.

Dr. Mark Vukonich, my guest today on Apple a Day with information about the upcoming influenza season, and encouragement to get your flu shot this season. Thanks for joining me today.

Dr. Vukonich: Thank you, Katie.

Katie Johnson: Dr. Mark Vukonich along with Katie Johnson, here on Apple a Day, reminding you that there is so much to do here. Get your flu shot, and stay healthy for it. Have a great day.