

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple A Day Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment featuring news and information you can use to live a healthier life. This is Katie Johnson and my guest today is Amy Fisher. She is an APRN CNP, lots of letters to mean a nurse practitioner in our pediatrics department here at Lake Region Healthcare, and here to talk to us about the flu season. Good morning Amy.

Amy Fisher: Good morning Katie.

Katie Johnson: Well, it is that time of year. Inevitably, it's the time of year that we really try to reach out to our patients with information about the upcoming flu season and with strong, strong recommendations and urging to get their flu shots. Let's start by talking about what we know about the upcoming flu season.

Amy Fisher: Well, they look over time what viruses are most likely to occur, and so that's how they try to decide what is in the flu vaccine. You don't always get the same flu that's in the flu vaccine, but by having the flu vaccine it can help with other types of flus not having as many complications, but you may still get influenza depending on the strain that you get.

Katie Johnson: So the flu shot itself is targeted at those that they believe will be most prevalent, but you're saying it can also make your symptoms less if you get one of the other strains of flu throughout the upcoming season?

Amy Fisher: Yes, that is correct.

Katie Johnson: That's really good to know. Why is it that we constantly talk about this, about why is the flu shot so important?

Amy Fisher: Well, because of the complications that occur. Prior to the flu shot there were many more deaths related to influenza, those influenza outbreaks in the past history. This helps lessen the death rate from influenza as well as complications. But we also have better testing for influenza, so if it's caught early we could treat it with antivirals at times, and just monitor those risks for complications, especially if they're a high-risk population such as someone with asthma, heart disease, things like that, that would put them at a higher risk if they would get influenza, but even the healthy adult can experience severe complications as well.

Katie Johnson: I think it's important to remember that not only are you protecting yourself from those severe complications if you are a relatively healthy person, you have to think about those vulnerable people around you.

Amy Fisher: Yes, that a great way to look at it. If I have a family member who has asthma I can help protect them by myself getting the flu shot and not developing influenza and putting them in risk, because even if they have the vaccine there is that risk that they could also develop the influenza as well, so I want to protect those family

members and those people I'm around who are at risk.

Katie Johnson: So what are the guidelines as far as who needs a flu shot?

Amy Fisher: Recommendations are anyone six months or older. If you are under nine years of age the recommendation is you get two the first year that you get a flu shot. So they would get one one day and a second one a month later if they're under nine years of age. We don't give it to anyone less than six months of age. That's another issue is protecting those children under six months, because of their small airways they're a higher risk for complications. They can give it to pregnant mothers to help protect that baby after the child is born, as well as the family members to help protect that infant.

Katie Johnson: For the children under nine again, did you say that's only if it's the first time they've had a flu shot? So if I'm seven years old and I had the flu shot last year, do I need one or two?

Amy Fisher: If you have the two vaccines the year before then you would only need the one.

Katie Johnson: After that. Another common question for children is about the FluMist that went away last year. What's the status on that?

Amy Fisher: That is not the recommendation. It will be the ... activated the actual injection of the vaccine so they will get a flu shot this year.

Katie Johnson: Only flu shots. When will this year's flu shot be available and then for how long, how late into the season, do we continue to give flu shots?

Amy Fisher: Well, the flu shots are available now, and there are the flu clinics that I'll let you talk about further. But any time from now until spring when there is a risk for influenza. The peak season varies from year to year. Sometimes it's in November. Sometimes it's in January. It can vary. It takes two weeks for the vaccine to work so you want to make sure that you have at least two weeks for it to work. Such as if you're going to travel, you'd want to have at least two weeks before you travel so that it's working while you're traveling, especially if you're in a closed cabin of an airplane or around a lot of people that would put you at higher risk for getting influenza.

Katie Johnson: That two week timeframe is important to know. As far as I understand, it will last the duration of the flu season, so you're better off just getting it early.

Amy Fisher: Yup, that's correct. Plus, influenza's a virus and so it can mutate and change throughout the season, and so that's another reason why we need to get it every year instead of once forever type of thing.

Katie Johnson: Are there any side effects to getting a flu shot?

Amy Fisher: Side effects; you can always get redness, swelling, warmth where the injection

occurred. You can get some achiness, a little bit of a fever. You do not actually get influenza from the vaccine because it is not a live vaccine. Maybe somebody was exposed to influenza before they got the vaccine, that would kind of explain too why they maybe had symptoms as well after the vaccine.

Katie Johnson: So some of those side effects might mimic some very mild influenza symptoms, but would not be possible to get influenza from a non-live vaccine?

Amy Fisher: That's correct.

Katie Johnson: There's lots of the myths that we hear about the flu shot. Any in particular that you want to try and dispel this morning?

Amy Fisher: Probably the biggest one is, "I'm not going to get a flu shot because I always get the flu from the vaccine." Like we talked about, a little bit of fever, achiness is not uncommon after the vaccine, but you don't get the horrible cough and pneumonia and things like that as complications after the vaccine has occurred.

Katie Johnson: That's a good point to talk about. What really are the symptoms of influenza? What should you do if you haven't had your flu shot or if you have and you start to experience some of those symptoms? Is it something you should seek medical attention for right away?

Amy Fisher: Well, especially if you're high risk for complications of influenza it is important to notify your healthcare provider within the first 24 hours if you can with high fevers, chills, runny nose, coughing, achiness, those are the major ones. A lot of people think the flu is vomiting and diarrhea. That can be involved with influenza, but it is not the primary symptom. That's more of a gastroenteritis where it affects your stomach, where influenza is an upper respiratory infection that has high risk for complications.

Katie Johnson: Well, you mentioned that we have flu shot clinics to make this nice and easy for patients to just drop in and get their flu shots, and I want to highlight some of those upcoming dates. The first time being tomorrow in our Battle Lake Clinic. So if you're a listener in the Battle Lake area or if it's more convenient for you to visit our Battle Lake Clinic that one will be tomorrow, Wednesday, October 4, all day 8:30 to 4:30. All of our flu shot clinics are drop-in any time during the clinic and get your flu shot.

The remaining upcoming dates then would be in Barnesville on October 6, in Ashby on October 11. That one's a morning clinic from 9 to 11. We have a Saturday date coming up at our Fergus clinic on Saturday, October 14, from eight to noon, and then our final flu shot clinic at the Fergus Falls main clinic will be on October 19 all day from eight until five.

We do encourage you to take advantage of those easy drop-in dates. If those don't work for you though see your provider. Call in and ask for your provider's nurse and make the effort to get the flu shot, not only, like we said, to protect yourself but to protect the loved ones around you.

Amy, any other last minute flu shot advice or flu season advice you have for our listeners?

Amy Fisher: Well, if you have an egg allergy where it's severe and you have anaphylactic reaction or you have reactions to eggs at all I would talk to your health care provider. There are situations that they may suggest you have it done in their office so they can monitor you afterwards or in types of anaphylactic reactions they may recommend you not get it.

The other big thing is always good hand washing, covering your cough, those are the biggest things. If you're sick stay home; don't spread it on. Just because you have a fever and you take a medication like acetaminophen, ibuprofen and it brings your temperature down, but you're still sick, you are still passing that virus onto somebody else. So covering your cough, washing your hands, and taking care of yourself, and drinking lots of fluids and resting are really important

Katie Johnson: Great advice from Amy Fisher, APRN CNP, in our pediatrics department here to give us some insight and encourage us all to get our flu shots. Cover our coughs, wash our hands and just take good care this winter season to try to keep influenza at a minimum in our community.

Thank you for your time today Amy.

Amy Fisher: You're welcome.

Katie Johnson: Amy Fisher and Katie Johnson on Apple A Day, reminding you there is so much to do here; stay healthy for it. Have a great day.