

SWINE FLU MYTHBUSTER

MYTH: Swine flu is a mild illness, so I don't really need the vaccine

Yes, swine flu is generally mild for healthy people, but for pregnant women and those with health problems it can be much more serious. So vaccination isn't just about keeping you safe and well – it's about protecting your patients and your colleagues, who may be more susceptible to the virus. It's also worth remembering that in a number of cases swine flu can kill otherwise healthy people. Don't underestimate the virus, get yourself protected!

MYTH: The effect on the NHS is being overplayed – swine flu won't cause us any problems

Actually, this could be the toughest ever winter for the NHS, as swine flu combines with other seasonal pressures, including seasonal flu. Getting yourself vaccinated is a simple way of helping to make sure you're fit and healthy, and able to play your part in the months ahead.

MYTH: I've already had swine flu so I don't need the vaccine

Many people think they've had swine flu when they haven't. Unless lab testing confirmed that you definitely had swine flu, you should still have the vaccination. When it comes to protecting you and your patients, it's better to be safe than sorry.

MYTH: The vaccine will give me the flu

The vaccines contain inactivated flu viruses so they can't give you flu. There is a small chance, you may get a mild fever and a few aches and pains immediately after the jab, but any side effects are usually very mild and will pass within 48 hours. Most people suffer nothing worse than a slightly sore arm.

MYTH: I don't treat anyone who has swine flu, so I don't need the vaccine

Health professionals are more likely to be exposed to the virus. If you catch it and pass it on to your patients, then they may become seriously ill. So don't take the risk – for yourself and your patients' sake, it's best to get the jab.

MYTH: You're infectious after having the jab, so you can't treat patients during that period

The vaccine won't make you infectious to anyone, so it is safe to carry on with your normal duties.

MYTH: The vaccines have been rushed out and haven't been properly tested – you simply don't know it's safe.

The vaccine had to pass stringent tests before being granted a licence by the European Medicines Agency. On top of this extensive trials involving thousands of people have been done on

very similar H5N1 flu vaccines. This means we are very confident that the new vaccine is low risk.

MYTH: The vaccine causes Guillain Barré Syndrome

There's absolutely no reason to suggest the swine flu vaccine is linked with Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS). The swine flu vaccine used in the United States in the 1970s did carry a small risk of GBS, but this was different to the vaccines used today. Checks on similar seasonal flu vaccines have revealed no association with the disease. However, a link has been shown between having a flu-like illness and developing GBS.

MYTH: I don't need the swine flu vaccine if I've already had the seasonal flu one

No, you should have both vaccines because swine flu is a completely different virus to the normal seasonal flu. It is safe to have both vaccinations at the same time.

MYTH: I never catch normal flu, so I can't see me getting swine flu

Many of us have built up resistance to seasonal flu but swine flu is a new virus, meaning that those of you who are lucky enough to avoid normal flu may find you get sick from swine flu.