FAQs on Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

1. Why is there a need to vaccinate against influenza (flu)?

   Even healthy people can become seriously ill from the flu. It can cause serious consequences (hospitalisation and even death) in high-risk groups like elderly, young children and people with low immunity. Those with pre-existing conditions, such as diabetes, heart diseases, kidney failure, lung diseases and neuromuscular disorder may experience respiratory and heart failure as a result of a lung infection.

   Vaccination is the most effective way to protect yourself from the flu virus. It also reduces the spreading of the virus to people around you.

2. Who should get the flu vaccine?

   Anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting flu can be vaccinated. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends people who are at higher risk of serious flu complications to get the flu vaccine:

   - Those who have chronic disorders of the lungs or heart, including asthma
   - Those requiring regular medical follow-up or hospitalisation because of:
     - chronic metabolic disease (e.g. diabetes mellitus, hypertension, diabetes mellitus
     - high cholesterol
     - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD))
     - kidney/blood disorders
     - lowered immunity caused by medications/HIV
   - Pregnant women at all stages of pregnancy
   - Children aged 6 to 59 months
   - Elderly (65 years and above)

3. Why do I need to get vaccinated against the flu every year?

   The flu virus evolves over the years. Immunity (protection against disease) against one virus strain (type) does not provide protection when a new strain is circulating. In addition, your immunity against the flu virus after vaccination declines over time. It may not be able to provide protection after a year.

4. What does the Northern and Southern Hemisphere flu vaccine mean, and which vaccination should I go for?

   Flu cases are most common during winter. The flu season in the northern region of the world lasts from October to March, while in the southern region, it begins in April and ends in September. WHO recommends the strain of virus to be included in the vaccine for each flu season.

5. Do I need to receive the flu vaccine again if I already received the flu vaccine in previous seasons?

   According to the most recent WHO advice, those who have received influenza vaccines previously will need to receive the upcoming flu vaccination if the virus strains are expected to be different.

   People who have received seasonal or earlier vaccines previously should be vaccinated with the most recent influenza vaccine to better protect themsleves against the circulating influenza viruses, even if their previous influenza vaccination was less than a year ago.

6. Can the vaccine be given to pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding?

   According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vaccine is safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Pregnant women can receive the flu vaccine anytime during their pregnancy. It can also protect the developing baby.

7. Are there people who should not receive this vaccine?

   Anyone with a severe allergic reaction after receiving a dose of the seasonal flu vaccine or allergic to components in the vaccine (like gentamycin, neomycin and formaldehyde) SHOULD NOT take the vaccination. The CDC has updated their guidelines on flu vaccines for people with egg allergies. Those who only experience hives after consuming eggs can receive the flu vaccine. People with other allergic reactions to eggs should receive the vaccine under the supervision of a healthcare worker trained in recognising and managing allergic conditions.

   Before receiving the vaccine, you should completely recover from any moderate or severe illnesses.

8. What possible side effects can I get from the flu vaccine?

   <u>Common Side Effects</u>
   The most common side effects include pain, redness or swelling in the area where the injection was given. Some people might experience headaches, muscle aches, fever, rashes, nausea and fainting. These side effects usually appear shortly after the shot and can last up to two days.

   <u>Severe Allergic Reactions</u>
   Vaccines, like any medication, can cause serious side effects such as severe allergic reactions. On the other hand, life-threatening allergic reactions to

vaccines are very rare. Guillain Barre Syndrom (GBS) is a rare neurologic disorder which may cause muscle weakness, however, there are insufficient evidences proving that it is related to flu vaccination. GBS cases are estimated to be one per million of vaccinated people. The benefits of flu vaccination in preventing serious illnesses and death outweigh the risk of GBS.

The flu vaccine does not cause flu. It contains only a weakened virus or particles that mimic the flu virus in our bodies.

9. How can I relieve common side effects of vaccination, such as fever, pain and swelling?

   For relief of fever and possible pain from the vaccination, you may:
   - Take paracetamol (e.g. Panadol)
   - Place a cold, wet cloth over the injection site for pain, redness or swelling

10. When do I know that a side effect is serious and I need to see a doctor?

    Please consult a doctor if you experience
    - side effects that last more than two days
    - high fever (>38°C) that persists for more than 48 hours (two days) despite taking paracetamol
    - fever accompanied by seizures
    - severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) where you may have severe anxiety, itchy skin rash, swelling of the lips and face or difficulty in breathing

    If you find the side effects serious, please seek immediate medical attention.

11. Other than vaccine, how else can we prevent the spread of the flu?

    The best way to avoid the flu is to get vaccinated. Simple precautions can also help reduce the spread of flu. These include covering your mouth/nose when you cough/sneeze, washing your hands well with soap and water, and wearing a mask to avoid respiratory infections.

12. **If I refuse to be vaccinated, what other ways can I protect myself from the flu virus?**

    You should practice good infection control like avoiding close contact with people who are sick, touching your face unnecessary and washing your hands, whether you are vaccinated or not. This will protect you against work-related and community exposures to the flu virus.

    Vaccination remains the most effective form of protection against exposures.

13. **Will I be protected against Covid-19 or the common cold after receiving the influenza vaccine?**

    The vaccine does not provide protection against Covid-19 but decreases the chances of you contracting influenza. In the current Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to reduce the risk of contracting influenza and its complications to help minimise wrong diagnosis.

14. **Does the vaccine increases the risk of getting Covid-19?**

    No, it does not increase the chance of contracting Covid-19.

15. **I have recently taken my Covid-19 vaccination or am planning to get my Covid-19 vaccination soon. Can I still take the flu vaccination?**

    Please complete both doses of Covid-19 vaccination and wait at least two weeks after the second dose before taking the flu vaccination. If you are unsure, please consult your doctor.

Useful links:

- WHO recommendations for influenza vaccination
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)