
a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

HCV Wellness: *“Flu Shots”*

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Influenza, also known as the “flu” affects an average of 5% to 20% of the United States’ population. The flu is not just a bad cold – it is a potentially serious illness. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), every year more than 200,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die from flu-related complications. Infants, young children, elderly and people with certain health conditions are at the greatest risk for serious complications.

The best way to prevent passing the flu is by not getting it. The best way to avoid the flu is through vaccination. Contrary to popular myths, vaccination does not give us the flu-- it protects us from getting it.

People living with chronic hepatitis C infection (HCV), cirrhosis, and those undergoing HCV treatment should ask their medical providers for an annual flu shot. Treatment may provide an excellent time to get a flu shot since interferon

stimulates the immune response. If you have complications from HCV, such as you are waiting for a liver transplant, your medical provider may recommend that you have an early flu shot.

There are two types of vaccines. The standard flu shot contains “killed” virus. The only “side effect” is a sore, possibly red injection site. The other type is a nasal-spray vaccine that contains live, weakened virus. It can be given to healthy people between 5 and 49 years old and who are not pregnant. Unlike the flu shot, the spray can cause mild flu-like symptoms and intensify asthma. Both types provide flu protection approximately 2 weeks after administered.

It is best to get the shot in October or November. Getting a flu shot in December or later is better than not getting one at all. Flu shots are recommended for all ages beginning with 6 months of age. The CDC particularly recommends flu shots for:

- People aged 50 years and older
- Residents of long-term care facilities
- Children aged 6–59 months
- Children from 6 months to 18 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- Women who might be pregnant during flu season
- Health-care personnel who provide direct patient care
- People living with or caring for children less than 6 months of age as well as those who are less than 5 years old or greater than 50
- People with chronic health conditions and people who live or care for them. These include asthma or other chronic lung problems, heart,

liver, kidney disease, cancer, diabetes, sickle-cell disease, HIV or other immune compromised condition such as taking corticosteroids, various blood or metabolic disorders and neuromuscular conditions (such as multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's and spinal cord injuries).

Those who should not get a flu shot are:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs
- People who have had a severe reaction to a flu shot in the past
- People who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting a flu shot in the past
- Children under 6 months old
- People with a moderate or severe illness with a fever. These people can be vaccinated once their symptoms lessen.

For more information, visit the CDC website - www.cdc.gov/flu

Be sure to check out the complete HCSP Factsheet Series at www.hcvadvocate.org


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For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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