
Treatment Information

Immunisation for Influenza and Pneumococcal Infections

Immunisation for Influenza and Pneumococcal Infections

Influenza and pneumococcal infection are responsible for a high proportion of serious illness from acute respiratory infections. These common infections can be prevented by immunisation.

People with inflammatory arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis, have an increased risk of infection due to the actual illness and also because of the medication they may be taking, such as methotrexate or anti-TNF therapy.

Influenza Vaccination

Flu is a highly infectious illness which spreads very rapidly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are already carrying the virus. Flu can lead to serious illness like bronchitis and pneumonia, and may require hospital treatment. Immunisation against influenza A and B is highly effective in protecting you. The flu virus changes every year, so you need to have a flu jab annually to make sure that you are protected against the latest strain of the virus.

We would advise that you receive the influenza vaccine annually, as soon as the current year's vaccine becomes available, and ideally before November as this will be before the incidence of influenza cases increase.

How do I arrange to have the flu jab?

Special flu clinics are held each autumn. Just ask your GP or practice nurse for details. The vaccines are normally given intramuscularly, into the upper arm or the outside of the thigh.

How does it work?

Your body starts making antibodies to the vaccine virus about a week to ten days after the injection, and they help protect you against any similar viruses with which you then come into contact.

Even though flu vaccinations will protect you against most flu viruses, they will not stop you catching the many other viruses that appear every winter.

Modern flu immunisation does not usually cause problems. You may experience a slight soreness in your arm following the injection. Sometimes, it can cause mild fever and slight muscle aches for a day or so. There is no active virus in a flu vaccine so it cannot cause flu. It should **not** cause a flare of your arthritis. Allergic reactions to the vaccine are rare.

Cautions

You should not have the flu vaccine if:

- you have a serious allergy to hen's eggs (very rare), this is because the vaccine is made from hens eggs
- you have had a previous allergic reaction to a flu vaccine

Rheumatology department Patient Information

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Women in an at-risk category should be vaccinated before the flu season, regardless of the stage of pregnancy. There is no evidence of risk from vaccinating pregnant or breast-feeding women.

Pneumococcal Vaccination

There is another important vaccine – pneumococcal vaccine.

Pneumococcal infection – infection with streptococcus pneumoniae (pneumococcus) is common, and may produce a range of illnesses. Some are more serious than others e.g. meningitis, septicaemia and pneumonia.

Pneumococci are spread by person-to-person contact, commonly by sneezing, coughing or close personal contact. Antibiotics may be used to treat pneumococcal infections, but resistance is becoming increasingly common. It is likely that vaccination against pneumococcus will have an increasingly large role to play in the fight against the infections in the future.

How often will I need this vaccination?

A single dose, with no repeat vaccination, is normally all that is required.

Safety and side effects

Mild local reactions such as redness, swelling, or tenderness can occur. They usually resolve 48 hours after the vaccination.

Although the safety of the vaccine has not been formally assessed during pregnancy, the vaccine may be given if clinically indicated.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions or need advice about your treatment phone the Rheumatology Advice line on

01202 442849.

www.poole.nhs.uk/our_services/rheumatology.asp

Rheumatology department Patient Information

For further health-related information, please contact:

The Health Information & Resource Centre

Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Longfleet Road

Poole

BH15 2JB

Telephone: (01202) 448003

Rheumatology Practitioners

November 2007. Date of Review November 2009

Rheumatology Department, Poole Hospital NHS Trust

Dr. P. Thompson, Dr. S. Richards

We can supply this information in larger print, on audiotape, or have it translated for you. A member of staff will be happy to discuss this with you. Please call PALS on 01202 448499 or the Health Information Centre on 01202 448003 for further advice