



Wednesday, November 12, 2003

## Vaccination helps keep the flu at bay

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

If you're in bed with a cough, cold and fever, you may have respiratory influenza, more commonly known as the flu.

For most people, getting the flu is a nuisance, causing lost work time and discomfort, including headache, dry cough, sore throat, body aches and nasal congestion. However, the flu can turn very serious for some people.

The flu is a highly infectious disease of the lungs, and can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 114,000 people in the United States are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. Most who die are 65 years and older. But children younger than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu.

The best way to prevent this illness is to receive the influenza vaccine, or flu shot. October and November are the best months to get vaccinated. However, vaccination in December or later still provides considerable protection.

A yearly flu shot is recommended for those who:

- wish to reduce their risk of getting respiratory influenza;
- are over the age of 50;
- have a chronic illness;
- are a health care provider to persons at high risk;
- are healthy children ages 6 to 23 months.

If you have experienced any of the following symptoms, you should not get a flu shot before talking with your doctor:

- severe allergy to hens' eggs;
- severe reaction to a flu shot in the past;
- or, if you previously developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) in the six weeks after getting a flu shot.

OU's **Graham Health and Counseling Center** is offering flu shot clinics on the following Mondays: Nov. 17 and 24 and Dec. 1, 8 and 15. The clinics are from 8:30 to 11 a.m. in the health center. No appointment is necessary. The cost is \$17. However, if you bring in a new, unwrapped toy you will receive \$5 off.

The Graham Health Center also offers flu shots by appointment. To make an appointment, contact the center at (248) 370-2341.

Immunizations, such as a flu shot, are covered by both OU's HMO plans. HAP and BlueCare Network subscribers are subject to a \$5 office visit co-pay while Community Blue covers immunizations for those up to 16 years old if they go to an in-network physician. Traditional Blue Cross/Blue Shield does not cover immunizations.

For more information on influenza, visit the **Center for Disease Control** Web site.

***This is the second article in a series on health-related issues. By being an informed health-care consumer, OU employees can help contain and reduce benefit costs to the university.***

### SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, November 12, 2003  
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, November 12, 2003  
Article Start Date: Wednesday, November 26, 2003