Hepatitis C or No Hepatitis C, Get a Flu Shot

September 21, 2015 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Here are subjects I do not debate:

- Whether the world is round or flat
- Whether the earth travels around the sun or the sun around the earth
- Whether dinosaurs and humans lived together
- The necessity of immunizations

I have opinions on various issues, but when it comes to scientific proof, I don't waste my time arguing facts. The earth is round, and it travels around the sun. The only place where humans and dinosaurs coexisted was on the Flintstones. I just got my flu shot.

When I think about flu shots, my mind goes to World War I, fought from 1914 to 1918. That horrible war took the lives of 16 to 17 million people in the world. More than 20 million were wounded. In the last year of that war, a flu pandemic began. It was called the Spanish flu, and it raged on for two years. There were 500 million infections, killing between 50 and 100 million people in the world.

I know that discussions about immunizations are controversial, but if speaking up means I lose readers but save lives, then it's a risk worth taking. I am not being histrionic. In some years, the flu causes more deaths in the U.S. than hepatitis C does.

People say they never had the flu until they got the shot. That argument doesn't hold water. Either you got your shot too late, or you had a one-day immune response which may make you feel like crap for the day, but it isn't anywhere like having the flu. If you are over 65, high dose flu shots are recommended, and some people feel a bit low and flu-ish the next day. This is not the flu - it is an immune system reaction. It may feel like you took a dose of interferon.

Those who should not get a flu shot are:

- Children younger than 6 months of age
- Those who have had a severe allergic reaction to chicken eggs or influenza vaccine
- People who have a moderate-to-severe illness with a fever (they should wait until they recover

to get vaccinated)

- People with a history of Guillain-BarrÃ© Syndrome that occurred after receiving influenza vaccine and who are not at risk for severe illness from flu should generally not receive vaccine. A doctor will help them decide whether the vaccine is recommended.

Now is the time to get the shot, assuming it is available in your area. If you have any kind of medical insurance, it should be free. Some communities have free clinics. Most chain-store pharmacies and medical clinics offer flu shots.

Important Tip: Get a good night's sleep after receiving your flu shot.The *October 2015 Scientific American* discusses a 2003 immunization study showing that those who had a normal night's sleep had 97 percent higher antibody levels than a sleep-deprived group. Another study showed that those sleeping less than 6 hours after receiving hep B immunizations, had lower antibody levels.

Yes, you can be immunized while you are on hepatitis C treatment.

To some of you, this blog may sound opinionated and condescending. However, you may think differently if we had another flu pandemic. Between 3 and 5 percent of the world's population died. Using 5 percent and putting it in today's terms, that is roughly the entire U.S. population. A grim thought, considering the shot is free.

Please don't send me any hate comments. I know the arguments against vaccines. I used to believe them, until I saw that the research they were based on was fabricated. Andrew Wakefield's research has been retracted. If you want to know more about this controversy and how it has fueled decades of anti-vaccine sentiments, click here.

For more information, visit www.flu.gov

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