Flu and Heart Disease

Myth Versus Fact

How to help protect your heart and stay healthy

Mended Hearts

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The flu is a potentially serious respiratory virus that attacks the lungs, nose, and throat. It is NOT a common cold. There are many different strains of the influenza virus. Each year an average of 30 million people will get the flu. Serious outcomes of flu infection can result in hospitalization or death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk of serious flu complications.

Protecting yourself

Vaccines are one of the safest ways to help protect your health, even if you are taking prescription medications. Vaccine side effects are usually mild and go away on their own. Severe side effects are very rare.

Flu vaccine prevents tens of thousands of hospitalizations each year. For example, during the 2017-2018 season, flu vaccination prevented an estimated 960,000 flu-related hospitalizations.

If you have heart disease, it is important to get your flu shot every year. It is the best protection against the flu.

*Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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**MYTH**

- The Flu shot will give me the flu.
- I had my shot last year, so I will be fine.
- I am healthy now and I take my vitamins.
- The flu is not that bad. Even if I get it, I will be fine.

**FACT**

- The flu vaccine cannot cause the flu. The vaccine does not contain live virus.
- The vaccine changes each year to match circulating flu viruses, it is important to get vaccinated each year.
- Heart disease can make it harder for you to fight off certain diseases or make it more likely that you will have serious complications from certain diseases.
- Flu is distinct from a bad cold. Flu can also lead to more serious complications and even death.

**Flu and Heart Disease**

People with heart disease and those who have had a stroke have a higher risk of developing serious complications from flu. Among adults hospitalized with flu during the 2017-2018 influenza season, heart disease was among the most commonly-occurring chronic conditions; about half of adults hospitalized with flu during the 2017-2018 flu season had heart disease.

Flu vaccination is especially important for people with heart disease or who have had a stroke because they are at high risk for complications from flu.

In addition to getting the flu shot, and using everyday preventive actions such as covering coughs, washing hands often, and avoiding people who are sick, people with heart disease should also:

- Maintain a two week supply of your regular medications during flu season.
- Do not stop taking your regular medications without first consulting your doctor, especially in the event that you get the flu or another respiratory infection.
- People with heart failure should be alert to changes in their breathing and should promptly report changes to their doctor.

*Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*