



Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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Get Your SEASONAL Flu Shot



It's flu season again! The single best way to prevent the seasonal flu is to get the flu vaccine. Protect yourself AND your loved ones by getting a flu shot!

What is the difference between H1N1 (swine flu) and regular (seasonal) flu?

A new strain of flu, H1N1 began causing infection in the spring of 2009. Because this virus is so new, it has the potential to cause infection in a large number of people. So far, most of the infections have been mild.

While many people are worried about this new H1N1 flu, you still need to protect yourself from the seasonal flu.

What is the best way to avoid getting the seasonal flu?

Get a flu shot every year. The flu is very contagious. It can be easily spread from one person to another. When you get a flu shot, you'll protect your family, friends and co-workers too.

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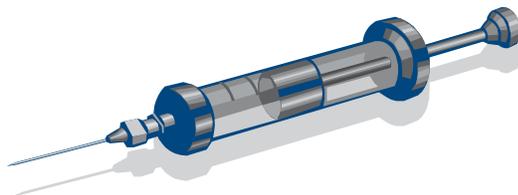
Is the flu shot safe?

Most people have no side effects at all. Some people have mild body aches, a headache, or low fever, but this is not the flu.

There is no live virus in the seasonal flu shot, so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot.

Who should get a flu shot?

- Pregnant women
- Children from 6 months to 5 years old
- People with ongoing health problems
- Adults over 50 years old
- Anyone in a community living center (nursing home, domiciliary, etc.)
- Families and caregivers of people who are at high risk



Who should *not* get a flu shot?

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs
- People who had a severe reaction to the flu shot in the past
- Children under 6 months old
- People who are already sick with a fever (get the flu shot once you are well)



How much does it cost?

For veterans, the flu shot is FREE at VA hospitals and clinics. Just call your health care provider.

How often do I need it?

October and November is the best time to get a flu shot, but you can still get it later in the year. You need to get a new flu shot each year.

References:

Adapted from “The Flu and You” and “CDC Says Take 3 Steps to Fight the Flu” brochures. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009.

Submitted by:
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Tamiflu®

(oseltamivir)

This medicine is used to **TREAT** or **PREVENT** the flu. It works for both the “normal” seasonal flu and the H1N1 (“swine flu”).

If you are taking Tamiflu to **treat** the flu:

- You will take Tamiflu twice a day for 5 days. (If you have kidney problems, your dose may be different.) Follow the directions on the prescription.
- Tamiflu works best when started within the **first 2 days** of flu symptoms. If you start taking it too late, the benefit is reduced.
- Take Tamiflu for the full treatment time, even if you feel better after the first few doses.
- Tamiflu should make your illness milder and you will feel better faster.

You may be told to take Tamiflu to **prevent** the flu:

- If you have been exposed to the flu **and** you are at high risk.
- You will take Tamiflu once a day for 10 days. (If you have kidney problems, your dose may be different.) Follow the directions on the prescription.

Possible Side Effects of Tamiflu®

Common:

- Nausea and vomiting (taking the medicine with food can help prevent this).

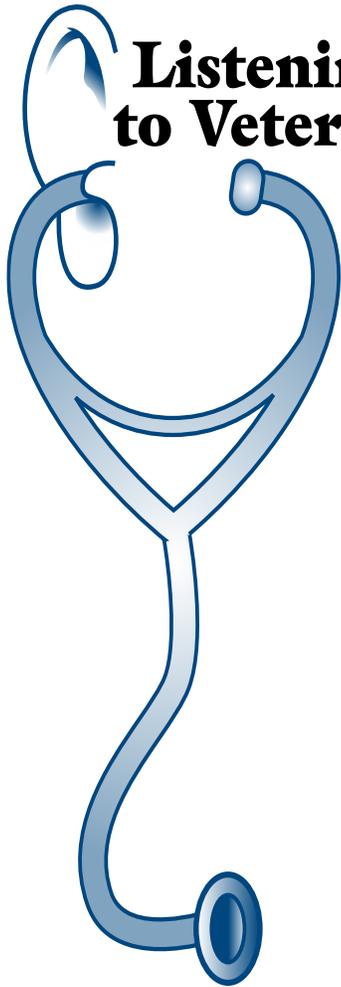
Severe (rare) – contact your health care provider if you have these:

- Allergic reaction: including severe rash, hives, chest tightness, or trouble breathing.
- Seizures, confusion, abnormal behavior. (These can also be caused by the flu itself.)

If you have the flu, don't spread it to others

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or shoulder, NOT into your hands.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. This is the way germs are spread.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners also work.
- Stay home (except to get medical care) and get plenty of rest. Limit contact with others to avoid spreading the flu.





I'm Having Trouble with my Sex Life. *What Can I Do?*



Answered by:
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Sexual problems are common among both men and women. These problems may affect satisfaction and happiness with life. In a national study, almost half the women and almost a third of the men ages 18-59 reported some issue with sexual problems.

Common sexual problems may include:

- ❖ a lack of sex drive
- ❖ relationship issues
- ❖ inability to become excited
- ❖ difficulty with getting or keeping an erection
- ❖ trouble reaching climax (either too quick or too slow)
- ❖ pain during sex

Sexual problems are often related to medical problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, heart disease or kidney disease.



Unhealthy lifestyle habits can contribute to poor sexual function. These include smoking, drinking alcohol, using recreational drugs, lack of exercise and poor diet. Stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues can also contribute to sexual problems.

Relationships take a lot of patience, time and energy. If communication has broken down, it can affect the couple's sexual activity. Even though it can be embarrassing, it is important to remember that you are not alone. Millions of people suffer from sexual problems.

There are several treatment options for sexual problems. Treatment may include medicine, counseling, healthy lifestyle changes or devices. The first step is to talk to your healthcare provider.

Healthy lifestyle changes promote a healthy sex life.

- ❖ Don't smoke, drink or use drugs (other than those prescribed to you).
- ❖ Choose a diet low in fat and cholesterol.
- ❖ Keep medical problems, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, under control.
- ❖ Get help with stress, anxiety and depression.

Couples may also benefit from working with a counselor to improve their communication skills.

It is important to remember that no one treatment works for everyone. Each treatment has good and bad effects. It is crucial that you are under the supervision of a trained healthcare provider.

The VA offers different programs to help individuals and couples. Your healthcare provider can refer you to classes or treatment options that will be right for you.

Reference:

Lauman, E. Paik, A. & Rosen, R. (1999). Sexual dysfunction in the United States: Prevalence and Predictors. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 281, 537-544.

Improving your Relationship with your Partner

Steps to Better Communication

Every relationship requires good communication to be successful. There are several keys to good communication with your partner.

1. Remember that as much as we would all like to believe it is possible, no one can read your mind.
2. Time is the greatest gift you can give your partner. The way you spend your time shows what is most important to you.
3. Allow time for interactive communication with your partner. Often times, your partner simply wants you to listen. After they're done telling you something, take time to repeat what you heard them say to be sure you heard everything correctly. This shows that you were really listening.
4. During discussions, stick to the topic at hand. Do not bring up the past in any way. Stay focused on the current problem. Avoid words like "always" and "never."



5. Learn the art of compromise. You cannot be in a successful relationship without compromising and finding agreeable solutions.

6. Be caring and considerate in your communication. Do not talk over your partner, interrupt your partner, use profanity, or call your partner names. Treat your partner with respect. This includes respecting their privacy.

7. Try not to be critical of your partner. No one is perfect. Communicate your concerns without a personal attack.

8. Learn how to close a disagreement in a healthy way. After the argument, take time to sit down and process how the communication went and what worked. Sometimes it is necessary to stop arguing and return to the issue later when you are both not so upset.

9. Continue dating and building your friendship. Having positive experiences will result in a stronger relationship.



Good communication skills are one of the keys to a successful relationship. If you are having problems in your relationship, talk to your health care provider.

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Important note: We are not able to mail this newsletter to you. It can be found in waiting rooms of your VA Medical Center and outpatient clinics.

You can also subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to www.visn12.va.gov Choose "Services" then "Veterans Wellness and Patient Education"



Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.

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***"Ask An Expert" Question
or Idea for Future Articles***

Do you have an "Ask An Expert" question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

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VISN 12 VA Healthcare facilities are accredited by The Joint Commission. Joint Commission evaluates healthcare facilities on quality, safety of patient care and safety of the environment.

If you have any concerns about patient care or safety in your facility, first contact the person in charge. If your concern cannot be resolved, the VA encourages you to contact Joint Commission. You may request a "public information interview." Requests can be made to:

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