



Flu cases on the rise

Hospital informing public on virus

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It's the heart of flu season and both the Center for Disease Control and local hospital officials are saying that the virus is more prevalent than it has been in recent years.

The CDC and Medical Center Hospital officials have said that the vaccine administered across the country is not quite as effective in preventing the virus as it has been in previous years. A second key reason, Dr. Sudip Bose, an MCH emergency room doctor, said there are

myths surrounding the vaccination causing some to not get the vaccine.

The CDC defines the flu as a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus which can lead to mild to severe illness. Each year the CDC researches the most common strains of the flu virus seen across the country and a vaccine is built around that research and predictions.

The 2014-2015 vaccine covers influenza A (H1N1), influenza A (H3N2) and, depending on the vaccine you receive, it also covers 'one or two' of the influenza B viruses, according to the CDC website. However, officials have said that a strain, unaccounted for, is what is causing the number of positive diagnoses to increase.

"I guess due to testing they (the CDC) found that there is an extra strain out there that our vaccine doesn't cover," Renna Geers, immunization program manager for the Ector County Health Department, said. "That doesn't mean you shouldn't get the vaccine."

MCH spokeswoman Tiffany Harston said that from Dec. 21, 2014 to Jan. 5, 2015 more than 230 patients have tested positive for the flu virus compared to 131 patients during the same time frame from last year. Geers said that the ECHD has issued more than 350 vaccinations just in December.

Although the numbers are growing, Bose said he is not worried and the public shouldn't be either.

"Yes the flu is contagious but panic is more contagious," Bose said. "If you show the symptoms of the flu it doesn't mean you need to rush in. It isn't an emergency condition. Most of it is self-limiting, it will get better on its own but that doesn't mean people shouldn't get vaccinated."

He also addressed the rising numbers along with the causes behind those numbers citing the growing population and several myths that surround the illness.

"Part of the reason the vaccine isn't as effective is that there is a larger population here," Bose said. "There are also a lot of myths about the flu vaccine because people say 'oh well I got it last year and it didn't work', but what really happened is they caught a different strain. It does work, there are no bad effects from it and that's been proven."

Bose went on to say that the rising numbers shouldn't cause alarm amongst the public and CDC statistics show that less and less people are dying from the flu every year. Bose also said that basic coughing hygiene, fluids, rest and over the counter support treatments can still be beneficial to help fight the flu virus if it is contracted.

Geers said that everyone is still encouraged to get the vaccine because it can still prevent the planned-for strains and prevent the virus from spreading.

"I would hope that they will go up and get the vaccine because it still protects people from hospitalization and the other flu viruses and there is more than one strain out there," she said.

If you haven't gotten the vaccine yet, Harston and Geers said there is still time as the hospital, the ECHD, and several clinics and pharmacies throughout the city are still administering the vaccine.

http://www.oaoa.com/news/local/article_6f980f02-9dbd-11e4-bc17-5bc285ee77d7.html