



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Podcast Episode 48 – Flu Awareness

October 9, 2025

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Gina: Welcome to this week's benefit detective podcast. I'm Gina.

Wendy: And I'm Wendy.

****doorbell****

Wendy: We have Dr. Lu from our Fort Bend County employee clinic with us today talking about flu awareness.

Gina: Hey, Dr. Lu. How's it going?

Dr. Lu: Hello. Thanks for having me back again.

Gina: So just to start, I found this tidbit of information on the cdc.gov website talking about when are people with flu contagious. And I just wanna throw this out there, and I thought that was very interesting. It said, "Influenza viruses can be detected in most infected persons beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick. People with flu are most contagious during the first three days of their illness. Some people, including young children and people with weakened immune systems, may be contagious for longer periods of time." And then it said, "some people can be infected with influenza viruses and have no symptoms, but still may be able to spread the viruses to their close contacts."

Gina: And, you know, I have this thing with my family. We always talk about the little ones. I swear, they are the cutest little incubators for germs because they go to day care. *laughing* They go to play dates. They go to the playground, and they come home, and you wanna love on them. And they're talking to you about their day, and then they spread the germs to you. So, I just thought I'd throw that in there.

Wendy: So, Dr. Lu, what does the flu do to our system?

Dr. Lu: Well, it, affects mainly the upper respiratory tract, and so it causes, commonly symptoms such as fever, chills, runny nose, stuffy nose, postnasal drainage, sore throat, cough, body aches, headache, and fatigue and malaise. And then for some people, they may even get, additional symptoms like nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal pain, but that's definitely fewer than, the other symptoms.

Wendy: And how long can it last?

Dr. Lu: Well, it always varies depending on the person.



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Dr. Lu: It could be as short as a few days, but up to two weeks is pretty common. And then in some cases, even longer depending on complications and their medical conditions.

Wendy: Why is it important to take the flu shot?

Dr. Lu: Well, the flu shot reduces your risk of getting the flu. It cannot guarantee you won't get it, but it reduces your risk. Also, if the strain of flu that infects you is similar to the strains of the vaccine, your symptoms may at least be less severe than if you had not been vaccinated. For those people, instead of being as miserable as a severe case of flu, it may just feel more like an annoying minor cold.

Gina: So, who is needing to take it? I know that there are those that are older people, but who else needs to take the flu shot?

Dr. Lu: Well, we recommend the flu vaccine for everyone who is not allergic to it and who does not have any other contraindications. But we especially recommend it for anyone who is at higher risk of severe complications of the flu, such as pneumonia or hospitalization or even death. So that would include anyone who has chronic lung diseases such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which would include chronic bronchitis or emphysema. It also includes anyone who is immunocompromised, which could be diabetic patients or patients taking immunosuppressants, meaning various medications, including steroids and even some of the newer medications for other conditions. All of them because the medications weaken the immune system or the medical condition like diabetes weakens the immune system that puts them at higher risk of having greater complications from the flu.

Gina: Doctor Liu, I know it's hard at times to tell between if you have a cold or if you have the flu. So how does one distinguish?

Dr. Lu: Good question. The main differentiators for me are the speed of onset and severity. Quite honestly, a lot of times I walk in and I can almost instantly tell who has flu and who has just a cold because the ones with the flu are lying down, miserable, and exhausted. And a lot of them start with, I feel like I got hit by a Mack truck.

Gina: Yes.

Dr. Lu: And so, you know, the flu usually causes a very rapid onset and worsening of symptoms over just half a day or less. It's almost always half a day or less. We're talking a few hours. So, they may go to work or school feeling fine or just minimal symptoms, and then they feel so bad they leave work or school early before it's even done because they just can't tolerate the symptoms anymore. And then the flu is also usually marked by extreme fatigue, feeling exhausted, and body aches. And so that's kinda different versus the cold is usually a lot more gradual, onset of symptoms, usually milder symptoms. For example, they may start with a little tickle in the throat one day, the next day is a sore throat plus another symptom such as runny nose. Then they develop stuffy nose and cough over the next few days, while some of the other symptoms may be resolving already. So, it's just overall milder and more gradual on-site gradual worsening.



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Wendy: Wow. And what is the difference between the live vaccine versus the not live vaccine?

Dr. Lu: Good question. So, the live vaccine is usually technically a live attenuated vaccine, which means that it does contain the actual virus, and it is alive, but it is weakened. So, because of this, you can actually contract the viral infection from the vaccine. But usually, that only happens if you're immunocompromised. So, it's generally safe for people with normal immune systems and the general population. Examples would include the measles, mumps, or rubella vaccine, the chickenpox or varicella vaccine known as Varivax, and the shingles vaccine, the Zostavax version, and, like, the polio oral vaccine and yellow fever vaccine. So those are actually some of the few that are actually live attenuated vaccines. Most of the vaccines that we give are inactive. And so, there is one, actually, one flu vaccine that is a live attenuated vaccine. It's a nasal spray, though. So, we really don't use it much. It's for people who just, for whatever reason, cannot tolerate needles. It's called FluMist, and it's actually an intranasal spray, which some people also don't like nasal sprays, but that's the option. But that's only for a select few, and we don't offer that in our clinic.

Dr. Lu: The other thing that people fail to think about is when do we give flu vaccines? During the cold and flu season. *laughing* Right? And as we already talked about, yes, you can get it from someone and not know it. People can be spreading it to you without knowing it because they're asymptomatic, so asymptomatic carriers. And so, therefore, it can just be coincidental timing that, hey. You were already infected by someone at the time that you already got the vaccine, but now you're just gonna attribute it to the vaccine. But, again, it's not actually possible to get it from the vaccine.

Gina: If we do get the flu, what can we do to help move it along? Like, what's the best remedy?

Dr. Lu: Good question. So, flu is one of the cases where I'm actually okay with you coming quickly because, there is treatment available, but you have to be diagnosed first. And so that's the first thing is make an appointment at the clinic. Come on in. If we're not available, you know, a lot of, clinics get kinda bombarded during the cold flu season. We have Teladoc available as well for free.

Gina: Yes.

Dr. Lu: And and so that's also a good option. And, certainly, even on Teladoc, they can sometimes make the decision to just, what we'd say, clinically diagnose. Meaning, even though they can't test you with the rapid flu test based on your symptoms as what I described, it would not be unreasonable to say, you probably have flu, especially if we're having a flu surge at the moment, then it makes sense. And so, yeah, if you come into the clinic, we get tested. And then, if that's confirmed, then we can treat you with, the most common treatment is oseltamivir. The brand name is Tamiflu. It is generic now, though, so it's not too expensive. There are some other options that they've come out with, but even still, they still say that, really, oseltamivir still has the best data. So, I still go with that one myself. Now, the problem with it, though, and that's why I urge you to come in quickly, is because you have to take it within forty-eight hours of symptom onset.

Gina: Oh, wow.



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Dr. Lu: Yeah. So that's the tough part. But remember what I said earlier, you can tell because flu usually hits you like a Mack truck real fast.

Gina: Mhmm.

Dr. Lu: And so, when you feel like that, you probably have flu. And, depending on how you look when I see you, sometimes I have made the clinical judgment that I don't care if that test is negative because the test is not perfect either. It's also not the best sensitivity. It's around sixty, seventy percent sensitivity, which means out of ten people who have flu for sure, three to four of them might test negative. So, but if I feel that clinically you probably have flu, I might still treat you anyway with oseltamivir. But, again, the key is you have to take it, like, get it in your mouth within forty-eight hours of symptom onset. So that's the one case where, yeah, don't take too long to come in because otherwise, it's you've just missed your window. It just doesn't work as well. Can't really guarantee. And the, oseltamivir and the other treatments, they basically are, they're antivirals. So, since flu is a virus, not a bacterium, you don't want antibiotics, you need an antiviral. And, they will reduce the severity of the symptoms, and that's subjective, obviously, but people do say they feel better. And it also reduces the duration of symptoms by about one to two days.

Gina: Wow.

Dr. Lu: So that's why it helps to come in quickly for that. Now the other thing too is for those people well, for these people as well and certainly the people who come in past forty-eight hours, there's also, of course, symptomatic treatment, meaning all the other medications that help with the symptoms but aren't antiviral. So, they're not gonna you know, technically, they don't cure the disease, but they help you feel better until you do. And the last big thing is definitely, stay home and get rest.

Gina: Yeah.

Dr. Lu: Sleep and rest really make a big difference, and we don't wanna continue spreading it to your coworkers because that's how you get these outbreaks in an office.

Gina: Exactly.

Dr. Lu: People just keep going back and spreading it around, and then it's better to have one person out for a few days than multiple people out for many days.

Gina: Yes

Wendy: If you're needing a flu shot, it's free for all Fort Bend County employees. The next flu shot location will be Friday, October 10 at the Justice Center Training Room. And next week will be the last week of our on-site locations, or you can go to the Fort Bend County employee clinic to receive your flu shot.



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Gina: Thank you to doctor Liu for joining us today and giving us a lot of information between the flu vaccines, the flu shot, and between the cold and the flu.

Dr. Lu: You're very welcome. Thanks for having me.

Gina: Well, that's a wrap for this week's Benefit Detective podcast. I'm Gina.

Wendy: And I'm Wendy. And listen for our next podcast.

Gina: And remember, the Benefit Detectives are here to help.