



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Podcast Episode 72 – A Shot of Wellness

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Pat: Welcome back to this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Pat.

Destanie: And I'm Destanie.

Pat: We're glad you could join us for another episode focused on helping Fort Bend County employees stay informed, healthy, and well.

Destanie: With the flu season here, we wanted to take some time to discuss flu vaccines, why they're important, and what employees should know before getting their annual flu shot.

Pat: To help us answer some of our most common questions, we're joined by Dr. Lu. Thank you for coming back for this week's podcast.

Dr. Lu: Thank you for having me back.

Pat: Let's talk about how getting vaccinated can make a difference beyond our own individual health. We work alongside colleagues every day and interact with members of our community, including people who may be more vulnerable to illness. How does getting vaccinated help protect our workplace and community?

Dr. Lu: Good question. Well, this, I think, speaks broadly of all vaccines. If you think about what is the purpose of any vaccine, yes, individually, to prevent that individual from getting the disease. But as you say, especially in the case of something a little different, but a different vaccine, the Tdap vaccine, it's also what we call herd immunity. And the fewer people there are who have the illness, in this case flu, the fewer people there are to spread it to other people in the workplace and the community. Right.

Dr. Lu: So, it's really not just for yourself but to help everyone around you. Because the opposite I see every day, I've already seen it several times in the past couple of weeks, where, you know, people get sick. They keep going to work. They're not wearing a mask. They're getting around people, especially when it's a small office space. They're spreading it around. And then days later, they come see us, and, oh, you have the flu. And, oh, so I should tell my



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coworkers. Yes. You should tell them. But, you know, again, if they had been vaccinated, hopefully, they didn't get it, or it would be much milder.

Dr. Lu: And then also, yes, getting treated and isolated sooner so they don't continue spending at work. And that's how you can help the greater community. Also, a lot of the Fort Bend County employees. It is a government employer, and there are a lot of public-facing jobs where you may come across many people in the public. And just think, if you've got the flu and you keep talking to 25, 50, 100 people a day, all those people are potentially exposed and then spreading it to more people. So that's why it's very important to do what we can. Again, it's not a perfect vaccine, but do what we can to minimize the spread, or minimize getting it in the first place and therefore decrease the spread.

Destanie: Many people know that getting a flu shot is recommended every year, but they may not understand why. Why is it important to get a flu vaccine every year?

Dr. Lu: Good question. So, in order to understand the answer, you have to understand the process of creating these flu vaccines. So, every season, they look at the data from the previous year, and, honestly, they're making an educated guess, so I might call it a gamble, as to what the prevalent strains will be in the coming season because they need some lead time, as you can imagine. I don't know the exact timing, but probably, I would guess, at least several months to, after selecting which strains, then create and produce the vaccine in mass volume so that it's ready to distribute in the fall and winter when we start administering it to everyone.

Dr. Lu: So, they make that selection. And also, that's based again off annual data. And each year, every season can be different from the previous ones. So, every year may have a different strain. For all we know, sometimes maybe two years in a row might be the same strain. I remember distinctly there was one time that they said specifically the flu vaccine for that year was actually exactly the same as the previous year because, based on their data and research, they anticipated the same strains to be prevalent. So sometimes they repeat, sometimes they don't. This year, I believe I read somewhere that they actually eliminated one strain because the previous strain was a quadrivalent, so there are four strains. And it was two types 'A' and two types of 'B'. But, again, based on data, they realized, well, you know, one of those 'B' strains is actually not that prevalent, and it's really more 'A'.

Dr. Lu: So, this year is actually a trivalent, meaning three strains, and I believe it's two 'A' and one 'B'. So, every year might be a different mix because of data and statistics and what they speculate will happen. The other reason, too, I was made aware of because I was wondering the same question myself. And when I did travel medicine for Concentra in the past, as you can imagine, the world being so big in different climates at different times depending on which hemisphere you're in, well, the flu basically is present year-round somewhere in the world. And



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people are so international and travelling, so I think that's why sometimes, every once in a while, we even see the flu in the summer.

Dr. Lu: But, in those recommendations for vaccines, among them flu vaccines, they actually do specifically explain clearly that the flu vaccine is actually only protected for about six months. So, that's why we have to keep doing it every year because it only protects you for about six months. Now fortunately, the flu season only lasts about six months for us, unlike some places in the world where it's year-round, but that's why we have to do it every year. So, both because the vaccine only lasts six months and because the mix changes potentially every year.

Pat: Interesting. That's a great point. One concern people sometimes have is what's actually in the vaccine. Does the flu vaccine contain a live virus, and can receiving the vaccine cause someone to develop the flu?

Dr. Lu: Good question. Often asked by my patients, yes. So, the answer is yes and no. The... There is one type of flu vaccine that does contain what we call a live attenuated virus. That means it is live but is weakened. That's what attenuated means. However, that is the intranasal vaccine. Honestly, I don't even keep track of it because when I first heard about it, I was kinda wondering and had concerns about that. And then later... A few years later, they said that actually they do not recommend it because, one, yes, it can actually cause the flu, and two, it wasn't that effective. So why would you take something that is not even that effective anyway and have that risk of getting the flu?

Dr. Lu: And so... And then I think it was primarily used in kids anyway just to avoid the injection. Right? But as far as adults, in our clinic, we only give the flu virus, which is the injectable. And so that form is what we call an inactivated or killed virus, vaccine. So, therefore, it is actually not possible at all to get flu from the flu vaccine, at least the one that we give. Give. Okay. And that's very important to understand. I know lots of people have, you know, hesitations, concerns about that, and they typically ask, you know, why they get sick, but it is not from the actual flu virus or the vaccine. It is impossible.

Pat: Let's talk about what employees can expect after receiving their flu shot.

Dr. Lu: Okay. Well, fortunately, some people don't really experience any side effects. They're very minimal. I would say the most common is certainly just muscle soreness at the injection site. So, you can have some pain, as well as sometimes you can get a little bit more of a reaction, maybe some redness, swelling, even bruising, or just kinda... It feels a little harder, what we call tendered. But that's usually self-limited. You know, maybe a couple days. And usually, if you move the arm around, use it more, it'll kinda work itself out. You could also get muscle aches, tiredness, headache, fever. And the last thing is that kind of... As we kind of touched on a little



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bit earlier, the question of whether or not you can get the flu from the vaccine. And so, as we said, the answer is you cannot get the actual flu, but I think a couple things are possible.

Dr. Lu: And there's also another question that a lot of patients ask. So, one, you gotta always remember, when do we get the flu vaccine? In the cold and flu season. Right? So, wouldn't you think it's possible you could have gotten the flu or an illness, right, some other viral illness or cold, from someone else around the same time, and it just happens to coincide with a short period after the vaccine? Right? So that's always a possibility. The other thing too is that the way the body's immune system responds to the vaccine is to, you know, kind of basically form the antibodies to learn to attack the flu. And so that immune process sometimes causes inflammation, and these inflammatory chemicals and hormones kinda go throughout the body and are the same ones that, when you get sick, those other ones released.

Dr. Lu: So, as you can imagine, then if you're responding to even the vaccine, you can get very similar symptoms like the fever, the body aches, and even some of the other stuff. So that's why a lot of times people assume that their symptoms are the actual flu from the vaccine, which again is not possible. So, if y'all can understand that, we're golden, and y'all can spread the word and explain that to everyone.

Destanie: We know that everyone's health needs can be different, and some people may have concerns about whether the vaccine is right for them. Who should get the vaccine, and are there any reasons someone should wait to get vaccinated or speak with their doctor first?

Dr. Lu: Yes. So generally speaking, I would say the vast majority of people I would encourage to get the flu vaccine. You can start as early as six months. However, in our clinic, we see patients starting at five years of age. Another caveat too is that for adults 65 and older, it's recommended to get what's called the high-dose, inactivated influenza vaccine. So, it's a special version. Like, we give the flu zone. This would be the flu zone, quote, high dose. And so, it just works better. They need a higher dose of the strains to get a better response. Unfortunately, we don't have that in our clinic, but you can check around at places that do give vaccines, and they probably can offer that.

Dr. Lu: The other thing too is that anyone with any kind of immunosuppressed or immunocompromised conditions – so that might be either conditions such as HIV, AIDS, or other things that weaken the immune system – may wanna discuss with us and see if you're a good candidate or not. I would say in general, diabetes, go ahead. Yes. Definitely get it. But some of the other more rare conditions. Also, anyone who's on an immunosuppressant, you may wanna discuss that with us as well or with your provider, whoever's prescribing that, because, as the name says, it suppresses the immune system. So, the problem with them is you might not get as good of a response because of that medication that you're on.



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Dr. Lu: So, definitely, I would say discuss that with whoever's prescribing that immunosuppressant, and they usually should be able to answer that. The other thing too is that anyone who has had severe egg allergies or history of Guillain-Barré syndrome should point that out to whoever is going to administer the vaccine, and then they should contact one of the clinicians to get a consult and discuss that in a little bit more depth to see if they are candidates or not.

Destanie: Thank you, Dr. Lu, for taking the time to answer our questions and help understand the importance of the flu vaccination.

Dr. Lu: You're very welcome. Thank you as always for having me again.

Patricia: We hope today's conversation helped clear up some common questions and gave our employees helpful information as we head into the flu season.

Destanie: Remember, taking steps to protect your health can also help protect the people around you. If you have any questions about whether the flu vaccine is appropriate for you, speak with your health care provider. Stay tuned for our next podcast.

Pat: I'm Miss Pat.

Destanie: And I'm Destanie.

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