

Newsletter 3 - September 7, 2011

Dear Patients,

I hope your Labor Day weekend was relaxing. As we enter fall, it's time to consider getting immunized against influenza. Influenza is a viral illness that is prevalent from November through March. It takes about 2 - 4 weeks after receiving the shot to build immunity and the immunity will last about 3 - 4 months. This year's vaccine is similar to last year's in that it protects against the 3 strains that are forecasted to cause the flu this year, including an H1N1-like strain.

I recommend that all of my patients consider getting the influenza vaccine. Influenza accounts for over 200,000 hospitalizations annually as well as 30,000 deaths nationwide. The vaccine is safe and side effects are infrequent. The vaccine does not contain any live virus, so it is impossible to contract a cold or flu from it. The most common side effect from the vaccine is a sore arm at the site of the injection. Rarely, one can get a flu-like side effect such as achy muscles or low-grade fever which occurs approximately 6 hours after the immunization; this is quickly improved by taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

At the time of your vaccine injection, we will also be checking as to whether you've already received your pneumococcal vaccine. This vaccination is recommended for patients over 65; a booster is sometimes given 5 - 7 years after the initial vaccination. Moreover, the vaccination is suggested for patients at younger ages with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, lung disease, and heart disease. The vaccination protects against the most common cause of pneumococcal pneumonia. It is a safe vaccination as it does not contain any live components. Again, the most common side effect is a sore arm at the vaccination site.

The flu vaccination is included as part of your retainer fee. Please feel free to stop by without an appointment any day, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 to 11:30am, for your immunization. The flu vaccination can also be given during a regularly scheduled appointment. For more information about influenza, check out my interview on Columbia Matters using the link below.

<http://www.columbiamatters.org/_files/videos/2010/November/CM1110_oken.html>

I would also like to use this newsletter to reiterate some general administrative issues:

• During regular office hours, please call the general office number 410-910-7500. In the event it is not answered personally, please leave a message as the voice mail is checked quite frequently. If you need anything after-hours, feel free to call me on my cell phone.

• Please contact me prior to going to an urgent care, minute clinic, or an emergency room. My goal is to minimize your need to be inconvenienced and moreover to avoid a prolonged wait, if it can be avoided. I am available after-hours to meet you at the office, or in some instances, treat you over the phone, and then see you the next day.

• If you have a true emergency, obviously call 911 first, then contact me directly on my cell phone. If possible, I want to contact the emergency room prior to your arrival to facilitate your evaluation. I will supervise your care in the emergency room and be reassured that in the event you are at Howard County General Hospital and I need to personally evaluate you in the ER, or admit you, I will be there promptly.

• If you are travelling out of the area, or even out of the country, feel free to call me for issues or advice. It is amazing how email, digital pictures, and cell phones have assisted me in helping you. In fact, if you have gmail, we can even arrange a video g-chat!

Finally, it’s hard to believe that’s its September. I want to thank each of you for allowing me the privilege of being your physician. I have been gratified with the positive response that you, my patients, have given me by supporting my retainer practice. In early October, I will be sending out re-enrollment information for 2012. There will be no increase in the retainer fee this year, nor do I see that changing for subsequent years going forward.

Wishing you good health,

Harry A. Oken, MD