



Sanofi Pasteur helps dispel flu vaccination myths

Sanofi Pasteur shares the facts behind how flu vaccination helps provide protection

Maidenhead, United Kingdom – 27th September 2017 – Following warnings from NHS England that Britain could face a significant increase in seasonal influenza (flu) cases this winter after a heavy flu season in Australia and New Zealand, it is important that people, particularly those in the at risk groups, think about protecting themselves against the virus this season. Sanofi Pasteur, a world leader in the development of flu vaccines, helps dispel some of the misconceptions around how the flu vaccination helps provide protection, which may have contributed to over half (51.4%) of people in the under 65 clinical at risk groups not being vaccinated against the flu virus last year.¹

Dr Ian Gray, Medical Head, Sanofi Pasteur UK & Ireland explains: *“For several years the medical community has been concerned about the consistently low number of eligible people in at risk groups taking up the NHS flu vaccination. In fact, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is developing guidance, due out in January 2018, about helping to increase the uptake of the free flu vaccination among people who are eligible.² In the meantime, Sanofi Pasteur wishes to share some key misconceptions that need addressing right now so that those at risk of flu and its complications can be better informed about why it is important to talk to their healthcare professional about the protection flu vaccination helps provide.”*

Flu is caused by an unpredictable virus that changes form continuously, so the composition of flu vaccines are redeveloped each year based on recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) on which strains are currently circulating.³ It is therefore vital that people in at risk groups get a vaccination every year because, although some of the symptoms of flu are similar to a bad cold, flu can also lead to more serious complications such as pneumonia and bronchitis.⁴ Research published in 2007 showed that in England and Wales, flu was responsible for between three quarters and over one million GP consultations from 2002 to 2003,⁵ and between 19,000 and 31,000 hospital admissions between 1996 and 2003.⁵ Particularly among at risk groups, flu can lead to severe illness and even death.⁴ In the UK, fatalities attributable to flu are estimated to range from around 4,000 to 14,000 per year, with an average of around 8,000 fatalities per year.⁶



Myth: “Flu vaccination does not work”

Fact: As with any vaccination, there is never a 100% guarantee of protection, but flu vaccination does help to protect the majority of those who receive it.⁷ Anyone unfortunate enough to still get flu following vaccination is likely to have a milder form which may be easier to get over.⁷

Myth: “Flu vaccination gives you the flu”

Fact: Injectable flu vaccines are made from inactivated (“disabled”) virus parts, therefore it is not possible for them to cause flu.⁸

Myth: “You are protected if you have had flu or have been vaccinated in previous years”

Fact: The only way to become immune to a virus is to build up antibodies against it. As the flu virus continuously changes, the immune system, in most cases, is unable to ‘recognise’ and therefore fight the virus from one year to the next. So, it’s important to have a flu vaccination every year.⁹

There are a large number of flu virus subtypes so the WHO conducts extensive surveillance throughout the year to identify which strains are currently circulating. The WHO can then advise on the best vaccine composition for the upcoming flu season.³ Sanofi Pasteur is now the world’s leading supplier of flu vaccines and produces approximately 40 percent of all flu vaccines distributed worldwide.

About influenza

Influenza or “flu” is an acute viral infection caused by influenza viruses, which spreads easily from person to person. Flu circulates all year round worldwide but mostly in the winter, which is why it’s sometimes referred to as seasonal flu. Influenza is characterised by a sudden onset of fever, cough (usually dry), headache, muscle and joint pain, severe malaise (feeling unwell), sore throat and a runny nose.¹⁰ The cough can be severe and can last two or more weeks. Most people recover from the fever and other symptoms within a week without requiring medical attention. However, influenza can cause severe illness or fatalities especially in those at high risk.¹⁰ The highest risk of complications occurs among pregnant women, children aged 6–59 months, the elderly, individuals with specific chronic medical conditions (such as HIV/AIDS, asthma, and heart or lung diseases), and healthcare workers.¹⁰

According to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) estimates, the influenza annual global attack rates are estimated at 5-10% in adults and 20–30% in children.¹¹ Worldwide, annual influenza epidemics result in three to five million cases of severe illness, and 250,000 to 500,000 deaths.¹⁰ In the UK, fatalities attributable to flu are estimated to range from around 4,000 to 14,000 per year, with an average of around 8,000 fatalities per year.⁶



About Sanofi

Sanofi, a global healthcare leader, discovers, develops and distributes therapeutic solutions focused on patients' needs. Sanofi is organized into five global business units: Diabetes and Cardiovascular, General Medicines and Emerging Markets, Sanofi Genzyme, Sanofi Pasteur and Consumer Healthcare. Sanofi is listed in Paris (EURONEXT: [SAN](#)) and in New York (NYSE: [SNY](#)).

Sanofi Pasteur, the vaccines division of Sanofi, provides more than one billion doses of vaccine each year, making it possible to immunise more than 500 million people across the globe. A world leader in the vaccine industry, Sanofi Pasteur produces a portfolio of high quality vaccines that matches its areas of expertise and meets public-health demand. The company's heritage, to create vaccines that protect life, dates back more than a century.

Sanofi Pasteur is the world's largest manufacturer of influenza vaccines. In 2016, Sanofi Pasteur confirmed its leadership by completing a production of 200 million doses of seasonal influenza vaccine, i.e. approximately 40% of influenza vaccines distributed worldwide.

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⁶ Public Health England. Public Health England and the NHS Prepare for Unpredictable Flu Season. Available at:

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⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine. [online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm> [Accessed 15 Sep. 2017].

⁹ Van de Sandt, C., Kreijtz, J. and Rimmelzwaan, G. (2012). Evasion of Influenza A Viruses from Innate and Adaptive Immune Responses. *Viruses*, 4(12), pp.1438-1476.

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¹¹ Who.int. (2017). WHO | 23 November 2012, vol. 87, 47 (pp. 461–476). [online] Available at: <http://www.who.int/wer/2012/wer8747/en/> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2017].