



NEED OF INFLUENZA VACCINATION IN PATIENTS WITH ASTHMA AND OTHER RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES.

Immune system is responsible for fighting disease-causing germs, called pathogens. But if the immune system is weak, it cannot fight these pathogens, due to which the disease condition worsens. Therefore, it is necessary to keep the immune system healthy.

Vaccines¹ are a way to ensure that our immune system works efficiently against pathogens. Vaccine acts as a training instructor to strengthen the immune system and destroy pathogens. It imitates an infection and prepares the immune system to protect against the actual disease.

The flu is contagious and primarily affects an individual's respiratory system - nose, throat, and lungs. Furthermore, the effects and complications² of Influenza can be seen throughout the body. Hence people with asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases (CRDs) are at greater risk!

Chronic respiratory diseases (CRDs)³ affect the airways along with the other structures of the lungs. Asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), pulmonary hypertension, and occupational lung diseases are some of the common CRDs.

As per WHO ³, 262 million people, including children, are asthmatic, and approximately 6% of worldwide deaths are caused due to COPD.

There are multiple factors³ that can lead to CRDs, including pollution, frequent respiratory infections during childhood, exposure to chemicals or dust, tobacco, and smoking. There's currently no cure for CRDs, but the adverse effects can be reduced with the help of different regular treatments.

Flu symptoms take a toll on every individual's physical and mental health. However, it is even worse for patients with respiratory-related conditions as it can increase chronic symptoms. Therefore, it is advisable for patients with asthma or any other respiratory diseases to get an influenza vaccination.

Here are a few reasons ⁴ why patients with respiratory diseases need to get the influenza vaccine:

1. Flu can affect the lungs of asthmatic or other CDR patients. It might lead to swelling and narrowing of the airways and cause further complications.
2. In the case of COPD patients, flu vaccination results in 38% reduction in influenza-related hospitalizations.
3. It is recommended that Flu Vx should be given to all patients with COPD. Ideally, it should be administered to patients with severe COPD with a Forced Expiratory Volume (FEV1) of 30-49%.
4. Influenza vaccination is highly effective in the prevention of influenza-related ARI (acute respiratory infection) regardless of the severity of COPD. Vaccination also reduces the incidence of influenza-related episodes of ARI.

Influenza or Flu vaccination is available as an injectable shot. According

to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA).⁵ flu vaccination is recommended for:

- Ages 6 months to 4 years: Get the flu shot.
- Ages 4 years and above: If your asthma is under control with no symptoms, you can get the flu shot or the nasal spray vaccine.
- Ages 4 years and above: If you have recent asthma episodes or wheezing, get the flu shot.

Vaccination is vital, but it is just one step in preventing influenza. Below are just three simple steps ⁵ that can help your patients to prevent it.

1. Maintain proper hygiene: Washing hands after regular intervals and before consuming food. Furthermore, it is important to do so after coughing or sneezing for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water. If outdoors, one can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

2. Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth, especially in public places.

3. Stay away from people who are infected.

Safe and effective vaccines have been used for over 60 years. WHO recommends ⁶ Influenza vaccines for Southern Hemisphere (SH) strains, specifically for India.

In the COVID-19 context, seasonal Influenza and COVID-19 can be a combined threat, more so for people with respiratory illnesses. Therefore, WHO and other recommending bodies from 21 major countries, including India, suggest ⁷ co-administration of the Influenza vaccine with the COVID-19 Vaccine.

Reference : 1. World Immunization Week 2022: Why Are Vaccines Important? Last accessed: June 29, 2022

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3. https://www.who.int/health-topics/chronic-respiratory-diseases#tab=tab_1 Last accessed: June 29, 2022

4. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm> Last accessed: June 29, 2022

5. <https://www.aafa.org/asthma/asthma-triggers/other-health-conditions/respiratory-infections/flu-influenza.aspx>

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