



## To the Editor:

Re: Dlamini Z, Kupa K, Schellack N. Colds and flu - an overview of their management. *South African Pharmaceutical Journal*. Vol 86 No 3 (2019). Available from: <http://www.sapj.co.za/index.php/SAPJ/article/view/2718>

I read with interest the article published in SAPJ regarding "Colds and flu - an overview of their management." There are, however, 2 statements that are rather confusing as they are in conflict with other references.

- ***"If a family member or house mate has already developed flu, vaccination of other members of the household, within 36–48 hours, will still provide effective protection against the virus."<sup>14</sup>***

The flu vaccine is not effective as postexposure prophylaxis for flu.<sup>1</sup>

It takes approximately two weeks for antibodies to develop after flu vaccine, while the incubation period for flu is approximately two days.<sup>2,3</sup> However, post-exposure antiviral prophylaxis within 48 hours of exposure to flu may be considered under certain circumstances.<sup>2,3</sup>

- ***"Please Note: Individuals with allergies to eggs or chicken proteins should not receive vaccines that are produced via egg-based culturing techniques."***

Although allergy to eggs is listed on the flu vaccine package inserts as a contraindication to its use, the current international guidelines now state that people with egg allergies may receive the flu vaccine.<sup>4</sup> Individuals with a history of severe egg allergy (e.g. anaphylaxis) after exposure to egg are recommended to receive the flu vaccine under the supervision of a health care provider who is able to recognise and manage severe allergic reactions.<sup>4,5</sup> The available literature does not seem to make any reference to chicken protein allergy as a contraindication to the flu vaccine.

With us being in the middle of our flu season, understandably, many readers are keen to find out all they can regarding flu. In light of this, could the statements above perhaps be reviewed by the author?

## Kind Regards

### Lynda Steyn (Pharmacist)

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Misconceptions about Seasonal Flu and Flu Vaccines. [updated 25 Sept 2018]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/misconceptions.htm>
2. World Health Organization. Influenza (Seasonal) Fact Sheets. © 2019. Available from: [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-\(seasonal\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-(seasonal))
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Influenza Antiviral Medications: Summary for Clinicians. [updated 27 Dec 2018]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/summary-clinicians.htm>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Influenza (Flu). [updated 18 April 2019]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm>
5. Immunization Action Coalition. Ask the Experts. Influenza. [updated 28 Feb 2019]. Available from: [http://www.immunize.org/askexperts/experts\\_inf.asp#recommendations](http://www.immunize.org/askexperts/experts_inf.asp#recommendations)

## Response:

We thank you for your comments pertaining to our recent influenza article and note the concerns that you have raised. We are aware of the more recent developments, especially in terms of the CDC, to move away from the traditional warnings about egg allergies and the flu vaccine. It should be noted that egg-based vaccine production is still being used on a global scale, although the industry has also been endeavouring to move away from this method of vaccine manufacturing. The CDC, and many other drug regulatory authorities across the globe, still clearly warns about the risk of administering egg-culture-derived vaccines to individuals with known, proven, and severe egg allergies. Traditionally, such vaccines would have been contraindicated in these individuals. Emerging opinion, however, and as stated by you, seems to be increasingly in favour of still administering these vaccines to individuals with egg allergies, unless such allergies are significantly severe. However, guidelines do also caution health workers to administer the vaccines under well-controlled circumstances, where emergency treatment options would be immediately available, in case of an anaphylactic reaction.

### Prof. Natalie Shellack