

## FLU Jabs

[The following is an extract from an information leaflet written by Dr Charles Shepherd of the ME Association - we have some copies available from the group.]

In late summer and early autumn when the flu season is not far away, doctors offer flu jabs to groups of people whose health may be seriously affected by a nasty dose of flu. But are flu jabs safe and wise if you have ME/CFS? Although there is no hard scientific evidence to confirm that vaccinations can either cause ME/CFS or result in a significant exacerbation of symptoms, there are plenty of anecdotal reports of this happening. So my advice, when it comes to any type of vaccination is that the decision has to be made on your individual circumstances - once you have weighed up the pros and cons of the vaccine in question

### Key Points in Favour Are:

- Flu vaccination should provide a fairly high degree of protection against those strains of flu which are likely to be around this winter. The vaccine reduces the chances of catching flu by about two-thirds. Protection continues for about a year.
- Anyone with serious health problems such as chest, heart, or kidney disease, diabetes, or who is taking steroid medication, is particularly at risk of developing serious complications from flu.
- If you have already had a flu vaccine while suffering from ME/CFS, and not suffered any adverse effects, then it is reasonable to assume that you should be OK this time around (although the viral make-up of the vaccine is changed from year to year).
- Serious adverse reactions are very rare with this vaccine although minor transient problems such as malaise, headaches and muscle pain do occur.
- The only published research study into adverse reactions to flu vaccine in people with ME/CFS concluded that people with ME/CFS were no more likely to have an adverse reaction. (ref: Influenza Vaccination: Is it appropriate for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome? *American Journal of Respiratory Medicine* 2002, 1: 3-9)

### Key Points Against Having Flu Vaccine Include:

- There are anecdotal reports of people with ME/CFS suffering a relapse following this particular vaccine. And in a small survey I carried out among MEA members, 7/21 had no problems at all; 13/21 reported an exacerbation of symptoms, ranging from mild (3) or moderate (7) through to severe relapse in three cases. Interestingly, there was one report involving a teenager who noticed a slight improvement in symptoms following her vaccination.
- It is impossible to predict who is going to suffer an adverse reaction, but some doctors (including myself) suspect that this is more likely to occur if you still have on-going flu-like/infective symptoms such as enlarged glands, sore throats, problems with temperature control etc. Interestingly some docs who treat HIV/AIDS also take a very cautious view when it comes to flu vaccination because it has been suggested that the vaccine could increase the production of HIV virus as a result of immune system activation.

**NB** Flu vaccine is generally contra-indicated in people who are allergic to eggs and poultry as it contains small amount of egg and poultry protein. One further contra-indication is having an active febrile illness. Some flu vaccines still include thiomersil - the controversial mercury-containing preservative that has now been withdrawn from childhood vaccinations following concerns that it could cause neurological problems.

### Further Info on possible links between Vaccinations and ME/CFS:

CFS linked to Vaccinations? CFS Research Review (Winter 2001, pp 6 - 8). Available on-line at the CFIDS website: [www.cfids.org](http://www.cfids.org) (& on Page 35-37 of Dr Shepherd's book "Living with ME")