

UNDER THE INFLUENCE!

No, this isn't about the consequences of too much alcohol – it's about the annual risk of a potentially serious illness. Its name – 'influenza' – comes from the Italian word for influence; astrologers once believed that the illness was caused by the 'influence' of the alignment of the sun, moon and planets. Of course, we know better now, but the name has stuck; it first appeared in English more than 300 years ago.

Influenza, or flu for short, can be a very unpleasant illness, lasting from 7 to 10 days. Symptoms include a fever, shivering, severe muscle pains and a headache. It may also cause respiratory symptoms such as a nasty cough, a sore throat and a stuffy nose. It's passed from person to person by droplets – and so by coughing, sneezing or contamination. There is no cure, so the aim is to alleviate the symptoms. Antibiotics are useless against flu, so you do not need to see a doctor unless complications arise. You should drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration, and rest and take regular Paracetamol to reduce temperature and relieve aches and pains. Though unpleasant for everybody, flu can be much more serious for certain groups. These include people who are over 65 years old, or who have a chronic long-term medical condition, such as asthma or diabetes. People in these groups are sometimes more vulnerable to the effects of flu, and this can lead to more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

For the general healthy population it's an unpleasant but relatively minor illness, from which most people recover quite quickly – that's why we don't offer flu jabs to everyone. For those who need it, though, the flu jab is the best protection against seasonal or winter flu. It can give 70-80% protection against infection, and it reduces the chance of flu causing pneumonia or chest infections, the likelihood of needing admission to hospital and the risk of death due to the complications the illness may cause.

Flu is a viral illness, affecting most warm-blooded creatures. What makes it especially hard to deal with is its ability to change form; every year, new strains appear. The flu jab is designed to protect against the strains which are most likely to be around in the coming winter; it's because these change so often that people at risk need a new jab every year. The jabs contain inactivated virus and so cannot cause flu, though your body takes a couple of weeks to build up effective protection. Sometimes there may be a little soreness around the injection site and – rarely – mild fever, muscle ache and tiredness some 6 to 12 hours later. Flu-like symptoms may of course be caused by many other viruses, and the flu jab cannot provide protection against these.

FLU JAB DAY IS SATURDAY 20 OCTOBER

We'll be holding our annual flu vaccination clinic on **SATURDAY 20 OCTOBER 2012** between **9.00.am.** and **3.00.pm.** **Free** vaccinations are available to all patients **aged over 65 years**, all other patients with **heart disease, diabetes, chest problems such as bronchitis or asthma, or long term kidney disease**, all **women who are pregnant** and **anyone who is a carer**, whether in a professional or voluntary capacity.

If you are in one of these categories it is important that you are protected against influenza. You don't need to book an appointment, but please check in at the Reception desk on arrival – you won't be able to use the automatic check-in machine, as it can only deal with pre-arranged appointments.

SURGERY UPDATES

The surgery will be closed from 12.30pm. on the following dates for staff training –

Thursday 11th October 2012

Tuesday 6th November 2012

In an emergency please contact the Out of Hours Service on **08450 568 060** or if necessary dial 999.

PHARMACY DELIVERIES

If you have made arrangements with a local pharmacy for medications to be delivered, any problems relating to delivery should be taken up with the pharmacy directly. Our involvement ends as soon as the prescription is passed to the pharmacy, and we cannot therefore help with delivery issues.

HOSPITAL APPOINTMENTS

We explained the new Choose and Book system for hospital appointments in the March Newsletter, and you can find all the details you need on line at –

www.nhs.uk/choices

If you have recently been referred to the hospital using Choose and Book and you wish to change the time, date or location, or to cancel your appointment, please **do not** telephone the hospital you are scheduled to attend, as this could in some cases result in your referral being cancelled altogether. Instead, please refer to the section headed *How to make your choice and book your appointment* in the appointment papers you have been sent, and get in touch with the Appointments Bureau on **0345 608 8888**;

The Bureau will be happy to help in rearranging or cancelling your appointment and will make sure that such problems are avoided. You'll be asked for your reference number and password, so be sure you have the instructions with you when you call.

ACTION PLAN

Over two hundred patients helped us by completing a survey about our Practice towards the end of 2011. From this feedback, we developed an action plan to take account of your comments and ideas. We are currently putting this plan into practice, and you can find full details by clicking on the 'Patient Forum' tab on our practice website at –

<http://www.grangeroadgpryton.nhs.uk>

If you don't have internet access and would like a paper copy, these are available at the Surgery.

There will be another survey later this year; if you'd be willing to take part, please leave your name and, if possible, an e-mail address at Reception.

URINE SAMPLES

We are having difficulties because so many urine samples are being handed in at the surgery with no information provided on the accompanying form; in fact, in quite a few cases even the form itself is missing! This creates problems in identifying the best treatment available or in deciding upon the most appropriate management option. In turn, this can cause delay in starting treatment – not to mention creating a lot of extra work for surgery staff.

We have developed a new form which will hopefully be easier to complete. Please make sure that all of the boxes are completed and that you have listed any symptoms you may have. In future, if the form is missing or incomplete we will need to contact you to ask you to complete another form.

ARE YOU A CARER?

We know there are lots of you out there, but we may not know who you are. We don't want to interfere or dictate what you should be doing, but we *do* want to be sure that you're aware of the support which you can call upon if you need it. The first and most important step is to recognise that you *are* a carer; you may feel that you are only fulfilling your role as a partner, family member, friend or neighbour, but if you are providing unpaid support to someone whose wellbeing might suffer without the help you give, then you are a carer!

Gateshead Crossroads can offer support in all kinds of ways you may not have thought of. You can find further details online at –

www.gatesheadcrossroads.org.uk

or by telephoning (01207) 549780 or writing to Crossroads Care Gateshead, The Old School, Smailes Lane, Highfield, ROWLANDS GILL NE39 2DB.

Crossroads also has a junior section, Young Carers, which caters for young people between the ages of 8 and 18 who, on a regular basis, provide care, assistance, supervision or support to someone they live with, carrying out significant tasks or assuming responsibilities at a level usually associated with an adult. Again, there are further details online at –

www.crossroadsyoungcarers.org

The rest of the contact details are as above, but substituting 'Young Carers' for 'Crossroads Care'.

If you're a carer, get in touch – you have nothing to lose and you might have a lot to gain!

BLOOD SAMPLE RESULTS

When you provide a blood sample, it normally takes about a week for the results to reach us and to be reviewed by our clinical staff. If there is a problem, or if the doctor or nurse wishes to talk to you about the results, we'll let you know right away. If you don't hear from us within ten days of giving your sample, there are no problems and no follow-up is required. If you feel that you really need to set your mind at rest, you can call the Surgery after ten days to check that all's well, but please do so after lunch, when the lines are (slightly) quieter!

GRANGE ROAD HEALTH TIP No. 10

A tip for carers this time. We know that a lot of our patients work in the caring environment, either professionally or voluntarily; if you are among them, please consider it your responsibility to protect those you care for by having a flu vaccination. As a carer, your vaccination is free. Just come along on our Flu Jab Day (see overleaf for details) but if that's not possible, you can make an appointment in the normal way.