



British Forces Germany Health Service

Headquarters, British Forces Germany Health Service
Bldg 1, 3 & 5 Stephen Way
Rhine Military Complex
BFPO 40

Military network: 94872 4230
Telephone: +49 (0)2161 472 4230
DII: BFGHealthsvcs-HQ-JHQ-SO3 Comms
E-Mail: christine.moses245@mod.uk



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FIGHTING FLU THIS WINTER

BFG Health Service is urging members of the community to check whether they should have the flu vaccine this winter.

Seasonal flu occurs every year, usually in winter. It is a highly infectious disease caused by a variety of different viruses. It spread rapidly through droplets dispersed by the coughs and sneezes of infected people. Each year, a vaccine is developed to protect against the strains of flu virus that are expected to be most prevalent that winter. The flu H1N1 (2009) virus, formerly known as 'swine flu', is now one of the group of seasonal flu viruses circulating around the world. Following a pandemic, it is often the case that the pandemic strain becomes the most common seasonal strain of influenza the next flu season, so it is not surprising to see H1N1 (2009) circulating this winter.

This year's seasonal flu vaccine includes a H1N1 (2009) component so that people who are vulnerable are protected against all the circulating strains. For the first time, the seasonal vaccine is being offered to **pregnant women** as they were disproportionately affected by the H1N1 (2009) strain during the pandemic and are more at risk of serious complications.

The seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for those **aged 65 or over** and those with the following conditions, regardless of age: **chronic respiratory disease, heart disease, renal disease and chronic liver disease, diabetes requiring insulin or oral hypoglycaemic drugs, immunosuppression.** Vaccination is also recommended for those living in long-stay residential care homes, all **deploying personnel, health care workers and carers.**

The seasonal flu vaccine does not usually cause side effects and it cannot cause flu, as there is no active virus in the vaccine. It takes about 10 days before your body starts making antibodies to the virus in the vaccine, so early uptake - before flu is circulating - is preferable.

Personnel deploying should contact their Unit for vaccination clinics. Members of the public in the 'at-risk' groups should contact the Medical centres to make an appointment.

Karen Oliveira, Health Protection Nurse said: "Other ways to protect yourself and your family against flu is to follow the Catch it, Bin it, Kill it advice. Always carry disposable tissues with you and use them to catch your cough or sneeze, then bin the tissue. To kill the germs, wash your hands with soap and water.

"If you suspect you have flu, in the first instance, telephone the medical centre for advice on further treatment. The general advice is to stay warm, drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and take paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower a high temperature and relieve aches. Staying at home will help prevent the spread of the infection to others. Your GP can also prescribe antiviral drugs which are given to high risk patients who become ill with seasonal influenza. They are most effective if taken within 48 hours of onset and may help limit the impact of some symptoms and reduce the potential for serious complications. They are also used in some situations where it is important to help prevent people from getting influenza."

Symptoms of seasonal flu include sudden onset of fever, cough as well as sore throat, aching muscles and joints.

For more information about the flu vaccine, visit <http://www.bfgnet.de/bfghs/bfghs.html>

ENDS