

IT'S ALMOST THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN!

You know what we mean – the time we need to be in good shape to fight off the usual winter crop of viruses which seem determined to make our lives miserable in the coming months. Colds are bad enough, but Influenza, or Flu, is worse; it 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. Flu is 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.

Flu is unpleasant for everybody, but 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, which can lead to more serious illnesses such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

Flu may be very unpleasant, but for the general healthy population it is a relatively short illness, from which people recover quite quickly – this is 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 likelihood of pneumonia or chest infection, the likelihood of a need for hospital admission and the likelihood of death due to the complications flu may cause. The flu jab protects against the most likely strains of flu that are likely to be around, and so it has to be given every year.

Flu jabs contain inactivated virus and cannot cause flu. 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 be caused by many other viruses, and the flu jab does not protect against these.

FLU JAB DAY

We'll be holding our annual flu vaccination clinic on **SATURDAY 8 OCTOBER 2011** between **9.00.am.** and **3.00.pm.** Free vaccinations are available to all patients **aged over 65 years** and all other patients with **heart disease, diabetes, chest problems such as bronchitis or asthma, or long term kidney disease.** 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.

MENDING BROKEN HEARTS

If you've visited the surgery recently, you may have seen our collection box for the British Heart Foundation's *Mending Broken Hearts* Appeal. We'll be collecting for this appeal on Flu Jab Day.

The appeal is helping to raise £50million for research into self-regeneration of heart muscle, copying the zebra fish, which can repair damage to its own heart.

CHANGES AT GRANGE ROAD

We're sorry to have had to say goodbye to Dr. Tom Stadward, who is now working full time with another practice in Gateshead. The good news is that he hopes to be able to help out with cover at Grange Road when our Doctors are on holiday.

In Dr. Stadward's place, we welcome Dr. Laura Anderson, who will be at Grange Road for a half-day on Mondays and all day on Wednesdays. Dr. Anderson lives locally and has been working as a locum in surgeries across Northumberland. She is looking forward to holding a more permanent post as part of a team, giving her an opportunity to build up a continuing relationship with our patients.

REGISTERING NEW BABIES

Please could we ask all new mums to register their babies with the surgery as soon as possible, so that there is plenty of time for us to arrange the six-week check appointment for you and your baby.

VIRTUAL PATIENT FORUM AND PATIENT QUESTIONNAIRE

We're trying to set up a 'virtual' patient group as some people aren't able to attend the meetings of our existing patient's forum. We think that if the practice is to be as effective and efficient as possible, it's very important that as many people as possible can have a say in how we run things. If you would be willing to be part of this group please get in touch with reception to find out more.

We are busy with the planning for our next annual survey and to make sure we ask the right questions, in the right way, we need to know what you think we should choose as our key priorities when we think about the services we provide to you and all the other patients in our practice. What do *you* think are the most important issues about which we should consult our patients? For example, which of the following do you think we should be looking at –

- ❖ Clinical Care?
- ❖ Getting an appointment?
- ❖ Reception Services?
- ❖ Opening Times?
- ❖ Parking Facilities?
- ❖ Communication?

Please pass on any ideas or suggestions you may have to Sally Pern, our Practice Manager, or complete a suggestion form from the surgery waiting room.

APPOINTMENTS WITH A NURSE OR HEALTHCARE ASSISTANT

An ordinary appointment with a Nurse or Healthcare Assistant is only 10 minutes long. If you think you'll need longer than that, you should book a double appointment. If you're not sure how long your appointment will take, just ask; a Receptionist will help you make sure that you book sufficient time to deal fully with your concerns. Booking an extended appointment will also help to avoid long waiting times for other patients.

GRANGE ROAD HEALTH TIP No.6

If you are feeling stressed and are finding it hard to cope, try these three simple suggestions –

- ~ Give your partner a hug every day before work. Studies show this simple act really can help you remain calm when chaos ensues during your day.
- ~ Have a good cry. Crying can boost your immune system, lower stress hormone levels, relieve depression and help you think more clearly.
- ~ Twice a day, concentrate on breathing deeply for three to five minutes.

APPOINTMENTS FOR MEDICALS

If you require a medical examination, please contact the surgery to make a special appointment. The time needed can vary depending upon the type of examination required, and as the GPs carry out these examinations in their own time we need to check when your GP will be available. There is a fee for this service, and we'll give you details when we offer you an appointment. Please make sure that all your paperwork is completed and left at the surgery at least a full week before your appointment.

MEASLES

Measles can be a very serious and sometimes fatal illness. You can be protected by immunisation, and as a result of a mass immunisation programme the illness was almost completely eradicated in the United Kingdom. The vaccine came into use almost 50 years ago, so most people have no direct experience of how widespread and damaging the illness used to be. In 1998, it was claimed that the MMR (Measles/Mumps/Rubella) vaccine might be linked to autism; as a result, a substantial number of parents refused to allow their children to be vaccinated. The research supporting these claims has since been completely discredited, and earlier this year the British Medical Journal concluded that the claims were fraudulent. They still left a damaging legacy. In 1998 there were only 56 cases of measles in the UK, but because of the reduction in the percentage of protected children over the next ten years the number of cases in 2008 had risen to 1348, including at least two deaths. As long as there is a significant pool of unprotected individuals, the illness is likely to spread even further. As well as being at risk of infection, unprotected young people may be disadvantaged by public health concerns when applying for university places, working in health care or seeking to travel abroad. If you think you or your children may be unprotected, check the immunisation record issued at birth; if you have any queries we will be pleased to help. It isn't too late to put things right; although normally given to young children the vaccine is just as effective when given to older children or young adults.

UP-TO-DATE CONTACT DETAILS

Could we ask all patients who move house or change their telephone number to let us have your new details, bearing in mind that we can only accept patients living within the NE40 postcode area. It's especially important to make sure we have these details if you call with a query, to seek advice or to ask to be seen as an emergency, as we have recently had some problems when trying to call people back.