

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 12 OCTOBER

We'll be holding our annual flu vaccination clinic on **SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 2013** between **9.00.am.** and **12.00. Noon.** **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 UPDATE

The Surgery will be closed on the following dates –

Wednesday 25 December (Christmas Day)

Thursday 26 December (Boxing Day)

Thursday 1 January (New Year's Day)

In an emergency please contact the Out of Hours Service on **111** or, if necessary, call **999**.

CONSULTANT'S LETTERS

Did you know that you can have your own copy of the letter the consultant sends to your doctor when you've been referred to a hospital?

If you'd like to receive a copy, just ask at the hospital outpatients' desk when you check in for your appointment.

ROTAVIRUS VACCINE

Rotavirus is a highly infectious stomach bug that can strike anyone, but most often affects babies and young children. It causes gastroenteritis, usually in the form of an unpleasant bout of watery diarrhoea, though some sufferers may also be sick, have tummy-ache or become hot and feverish. The infection usually lasts for between three and eight days, but it can lead to problems such as severe dehydration in younger children. Almost one child in five will need to see a doctor, and one in fifty will need treatment in hospital.

After several years of research, vaccines have been developed to combat the virus. Rotarix, the vaccine now being offered in the UK, has been extensively used over the last four or five years in countries around the world, including Austria, Belgium, Finland and Canada. No safety concerns have arisen, and all of the relevant healthcare regulatory bodies, both here and across the world, agree that Rotarix poses no risk to health and is safe to use. The World Health Organisation has recommended that rotavirus vaccine should be included in all national immunisation programmes.

Rotarix has therefore been introduced into the UK childhood immunisation programme and in future new babies will be given two doses - usually at their scheduled two and three month visits. Rotarix is an oral vaccine and will be administered first, before the injectable vaccines. After having this vaccine, the body's natural defence system will produce antibodies against the common types of rotavirus - these antibodies help to protect against infection, reducing the risk by between 70% and 80%.

You can find out more about rotavirus online by visiting NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk - just enter 'rotavirus' in the search box - and if you have any other questions you are welcome to discuss these with your health visitor or practice nurse.

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD!

You may have noticed some new faces around the Heaton Road Surgery in recent months, and we'd like to take the opportunity of introducing our new colleagues.

Some of you may remember Dr. Lucy Cooling, who spent some time with us not so long ago as part of her GP training. Dr. Cooling obviously enjoyed the experience, as she rejoined us in July as part of our regular team.

Dr. Ratika Birdi has recently come to Heaton Road as a GP Registrar, as part of her training.

Sally Pern joined us in June as our Business Development Manager, having previously been Practice Manager at the Grange Road Practice in Ryton.

We extend a warm welcome to all three, and hope that their time at Heaton Road Surgery will be challenging, rewarding and enjoyable.

TEXT ALERTS

Starting from the end of September, we will be offering a text reminder service, initially for appointments only, but hopefully it will be extended to cover such things as regular medical checks and our annual 'flu jab' day. All you need to do is to contact reception and provide your personal mobile number; you'll receive a text reminder about your appointment a couple of days beforehand.

Once you've signed up, please keep us updated about any change to your number; we'd hate to surprise the wrong person by reminding them of an appointment they know nothing about!

FLUENZ FOR CHILDREN

Fluenz is a nasal spray vaccine to prevent seasonal influenza (flu) in children aged between 2 and 18 years.

The current free flu vaccination programme offered by the NHS covers people who are especially at risk because of their age or medical history, but the Department of Health has recommended that all children aged from 2 to 17, who are otherwise healthy, should ultimately be brought within this annual programme.

From September 2013, all children aged between 2 and 3 on 1 September 2013 are entitled to free vaccination using the Fluenz vaccine. The programme will be extended progressively until it covers all children up to 17 years of age.

The best time to have this flu vaccine is between September-November. If you have a child whom you would like to be vaccinated, who was aged between 2 and 3 on 1 September 2013, or if you have any other questions about the extended programme, please contact the surgery on 0191 265 5911.

ONLINE SERVICES

We'll soon be introducing facilities to book GP appointments or order repeat prescriptions online. If you're interested, just call at Reception. We'll give you a password and information on how to get started. If you are unable to leave your home, give us a ring at 0191 265 5911; we'll post your password and instructions to your home address.

HEATON ROAD HEALTH TIP No. 1

Make friends with your kitchen tap! It would be hard to over-emphasise the importance of water to the body. We are always being encouraged to drink water, but it's often easier said than done and we can easily forget. So, if you take tablets regularly, how about drinking a full glass of water instead of just a mouthful to wash them down? And how about an occasional glass of water *instead* of a coffee or tea - it would probably mean you wouldn't have the urge for a biscuit!