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Egg allergy versus egg intolerance

It makes a difference when getting the flu vaccine



Flu season is here and so is the need to be protected by getting vaccinated. This vaccine contains a very small amount of egg protein, so before giving it, health providers ask if you are allergic to eggs. But do you really know if you are allergic to egg? Could you have egg intolerance?

Food allergies affect millions of adults and children. On the flip side, many people think they are allergic and unnecessarily avoid certain products.

The big difference between a food intolerance and allergy is an allergy can cause a serious or even life-threatening reaction. This is why it is important to know if you have an allergy or intolerance to egg when you receive a flu vaccination. An allergist/immunologist has specialized training to properly diagnose your reaction to eggs or other foods.

To the Point

Recent studies show that depending on the severity of an egg allergy, flu vaccines are safe for most egg allergic individuals.

Food intolerance happens in the digestive system and occurs when you are unable to properly breakdown food. This could be due to enzyme deficiencies, sensitivity to food additives or reactions to naturally occurring chemicals in foods.

An allergic reaction involves the immune system or defense system. If you have an allergy to eggs, your immune system identifies eggs as an invader or allergen. Your immune system overreacts by producing antibodies called Immunoglobulin E (IgE). These antibodies travel to cells that release chemicals, causing an allergic reaction.

Recent studies show that most egg allergic individuals can receive the flu vaccine safely under the care of their allergist.

There are two ways people with confirmed egg allergy can receive the flu vaccine without being skin tested for the vaccine first:

- 1) One way is to receive the vaccine in two parts. You receive 10 percent of the full dose and wait 30 minutes to see if allergic symptoms develop. If symptoms do not develop, the remainder of the dosage is given and another 30 minute observation period is held.
- 2) Another way is to give the entire vaccine followed by a 30 minute observation period.

Both should be used under the direction of an allergist skilled in administering the vaccine to people with food allergies.

DID YOU KNOW?

There is a difference between having a food intolerance and a food allergy.

According to the CDC, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic resulted in more than 12,000 flu-related deaths in the U.S.



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An allergist/immunologist is the best-qualified medical expert to diagnose and treat allergies, asthma and immunodeficiencies. To find an allergist/immunologist near you, visit the Physician Referral Directory at www.aaaai.org.

For more information on allergies, asthma and immunodeficiencies, please visit the Patients & Consumers Center of the AAAAI website, www.aaaai.org.