Allergic to one vaccine, allergic to all? [1]

Dear Alice,

If I had a serious allergic reaction to the meningitis vaccine, will I be allergic to the flu shot?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Knowing whether a vaccine will cause an allergic reaction can be a shot in the dark. Although allergic reactions to the flu shot are not common, people who have had an allergic reaction to a vaccine—or whether it was for meningitis [2] or the flu—are strongly advised to discuss getting the flu shot [3] with a health care provider. It is recommended that people have a talk with their health care provider prior to getting a flu shot if they:

- Are allergic to eggs (the flu vaccine is grown in eggs).
- Had an allergic reaction to a previous flu shot.
- Had an allergic reaction to a previous vaccine.
- Have other severe allergies.
- Developed Gullain-Barre syndrome after receiving a flu vaccine.

List adapted from Seasonal Flu Shot [4] from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

If your health care provider advises you not to get the flu shot due to your prior allergic reaction to the meningitis vaccine [5] or for another reason, you may want to consider asking her/him to suggest alternative precautions you can take to stay healthy and flu-free this season. In the meantime, you may want to brush up on the Handwashing do's and don'ts [6] and check out the response in How can I boost my immune system? [7] in the Go Ask Alice! general health archives.

When 'tis the season to be flu-ey, the decision about whether to get the flu shot may best be made with the input of a health care provider.

Alice!

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