

Blog: 21.3.25

The fluvax arrived today! While these are free for over 65-year-olds and those with chronic conditions like asthma, they do prevent influenza for at least 2/3rd of those who get them and lessen the effect in the remaining 1/3. [There are more effective influenza vaccines just around the corner- maybe in as little as two years- with efficacy of over 97% over at least 8 years shown for one variant in Clinical 3 trials, and better than that will cover yet to emerge strains in a way current ones don't lessening the fear of another pandemic]. Now we have the Melbourne factory producing our jabs within 2 months, we don't have to guess what strains will be around more than 6 months in advance as we used to do when we got ours from Turin in Italy. Anyone who has read that hard-to-put down thriller 'I am Pilgrim', will be pleased about that! [Anyone who hasn't read it and loves a good yarn should as it's a really good read.]

The fluvax this year is the same as last year and it's based on what Australia and New Zealand surveillance sites like our surgery have shown is around, and what is currently in European and Northern American winters. We were seeing influenza right up until Christmas which is a bit unusual but have not seen it since so hopefully it's no longer got enough potential victims to spread, what the immunologists call 'herd immunity'.

Actually, our Public Health experts seem more alarmed at the rise in serious cases of measles overseas due to the disruptive effects on immunization schedules due to lockdowns and the misinformation spread through the internet by people like Robert Kennedy, Donald Trump's Health Minister. Catching measles damages 1 in a 1000 children or adults with it, causing brain damage [fast or slow over some years] and death. I have seen both unfortunately in my 40+ years practicing medicine. Anyway, it's a horrible illness to catch. I got it at 5 or 6 years old [there were no vaccines then] and remember two whole weeks in bed in a darkened room utterly miserable, with a high fever and aching, not eating [very unusual for me] and not wanting to do anything but suffer. Someone, a kind neighbor I think, dropped in a present for me and it lay unopened on my bed for two days until my mother opened it because I hadn't, and presents like that of drawing pencils and books were rare in those days!

We are still seeing quite a bit of covid, and even if it has dumbed down a lot and it's rare to be hospitalized these days, it's still quite a miserable weeklong illness and a few following weeks of lethargy. Do keep some testers at home. Even use expired ones, as they are often positive, but may miss the early and late stages. They are reliable if there are two red lines: it's just if they are negative with only one line it can't be guaranteed you don't have it.

I haven't had it yet- I do say my prayers and cross my fingers- but I will be masking up again through the airport as I go tomorrow on my two-week break: it's more like a crash and recover than a holiday! I worked through the Christmas New Year as the only doctor on and haven't had time off since 6/12 ago and really need this. But the Surgery is in excellent hands in my absence, and I will be energized [and bored] and ready to see patients again when I get back 6th April.

Be well, Jacqueline on behalf of the team at Tiakina Te Ora.