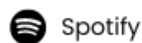




# HEALTHIER YOU

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## Season 1: Episode 12: What You Need To Know About COVID & Flu

Welcome to Healthier You by Vanderbilt Health & Wellness, a podcast to help Vanderbilt faculty and staff with their healthiest lives.

LG: My name is Lydia Gardner, and I am the communication specialist for Health & Wellness, and I am here with Julie Hurst today to discuss COVID and flu.

So, Julie, thank you for joining us. Julie is usually our host of the Occupational Health podcasts, and today, she is joining us as our expert. She is one of our nurse practitioners in our Occupational Health department. I just appreciate you being willing to jump in and answer these questions today.

JH: Thanks, Lydia.

LG: So, first we just wanted to start off and say you may wonder now that Flulapalooza/flulapalooza/Flulapalooza® is done, where you can go to receive your flu or COVID vaccination. So, Julie, can you tell us a little bit about where employees can go to receive their vaccinations?

JH: Sure, I can. Just a little update on some things, flu and COVID for everyone before we get kicked off in this flu season which we are on the cusp of. For COVID and flu vaccination, and employees now since we have passed the Flulapalooza, Flulapalooza®, they can walk into the OHC, or Occupational Health Clinic without an appointment and they can receive one or the other vaccines, or they can receive both at the same time. That is perfectly OK, as well. The Occupational Health Clinic business hours are Monday through Friday, excluding holidays from 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. We now have, and this is in the Medical Arts Building, it is on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, and we now have someone that is a dedicated person just to provide those vaccinations. They are going to sit outside the clinic, in an area that is very easy to find.

There are going to be signs marking it so when you come off the elevators on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, you will see the signs and be able to just go right there.

Other locations that are offering the vaccination include One Hundred Oaks, which is every Thursday from 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., if you are working out in that area, or if you are an employee that lives and works near an outlying facility, like an outlying VUMC location such as the Wilson County Hospital, the Bedford County Hospital, or the Tullahoma-Harton Hospital, they have Occupational Health clinics there as well that are providing those vaccinations. I am not exactly sure on their hours, but if you go to our website, you can find the registered nurse that is out there providing those vaccinations.

LG: We can definitely link to those in the show notes as well. How long will the COVID vaccination and flu vaccinations be offered?

JH: The flu vaccination is usually offered until about the March/April time period. So, sometime in the spring, that is the end of the flu season, and then, you know, of course, they will do another formulation for next year's flu season. So, the COVID vaccine is typically offered until there is an updated vaccine that replaces it, or the current vaccine supply is exhausted.

LG: Even though it is offered all the way through March and April, can you remind us of the deadline, because I know VUMC employees have that deadline for compliance, correct? For an approved exemption, or to receive the flu vaccination.

JH: That is correct. December 1<sup>st</sup> each year is that deadline to make sure you have your flu vaccine or an exemption that is approved in the system. That is set in stone for the flu. Now, with COVID vaccination, the boosters that have come out, there is no additional requirement for those. So, that is just kind of on a voluntary basis if you want to come over and have that done.

LG: And, I know they had talked about before too that they can record that COVID vaccination for you in your Occupational Health record, correct? So, if you want it recorded then you can have it there, so that you know you had it.

JH: Absolutely. Yes.

LG: But if not, you don't have to.

JH: We will keep everything updated in the Occupational Health record, which is useful, very useful.

LG: Yes, for sure. Let's back up a little bit and talk a little bit about COVID and flu. So, I know we always hear so much about them, but could you share a little bit about what the symptoms are this year, what are you seeing for symptoms for COVID and flu, and what can people do if they think they might have symptoms, and have concern for either illness?

JH: Well COVID and flu, they are both viruses. They share very similar symptoms. Each virus presents a little bit different, depending on the individual. So, I mean, even one person with COVID and another person with COVID, they are going to look a little bit different because all of our immune symptoms are different. And so, it is important to note that sometimes that each virus can have just a combination of symptoms, and the most common ones that we see, you know, either singularly or in combination are going to be fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, or just getting easily winded, fatigue, sore throat,

runny nose, congestion, and muscle pains, body aches, those kinds of things. Headache sometimes, and then on occasion there is some nausea, vomiting, diarrhea that is present. And then, more associated with COVID is just the changes in taste and smell. But sometimes that can also happen, you know, in flu, just depending on how bad you know, your congestion ends up getting. So, typically, when someone is exposed, that's essentially the symptoms. And then, you know, I think it is important if you are going to try to differentiate between the two, is to kind of know maybe when you were exposed, that can be helpful, not always, but it can be.

Typically, if you are exposed to COVID, it may take anywhere from 2 to 14 days for symptoms to appear. So, that is a pretty broad window, but just something to keep in mind, and then flu, typically those symptoms happen about 1 to 4 days after you have been exposed to somebody that has the flu. So, this is just, you know, it's not going to be a fool-proof method of figuring out which one that you may have, but sometimes it could be a helpful clue if you have interacted with somebody that you knew had one or the other of those viruses. Just to try to determine where your symptoms might be coming from. Sometimes, it is just unknown, like all of sudden symptoms show up and you just have no idea where you may have picked it up, and that's OK too.

Either way, if you have symptoms, and you know, you want to determine which one of these may be causing it, you can get what we call point of care testing. So, essentially what that means is you are going to get a flu test or a COVID test, some places, you know can have both of them together, but it is essentially where you can get the results right away during that visit. you can basically get point of care testing from retail pharmacies, the Vanderbilt Walk-In Clinics, they all offer it, and you will get the immediate result so that you know, and you are able to let the proper folks at work know what those results are as well.

Both COVID and flu are viruses and obviously the treatment for viruses is mostly supportive care, which you know, I have this conversation with folks daily, as far as just making sure you get lots of rest, maintain your hydration with fluids, make sure that you are eating easily digestible foods, sometimes, kind of bland foods is encouraged. Just not to, you know, upset the stomach while your body is really trying to recover. Anti-inflammatories are really helpful for pain and fever, and then sometimes over-the-counter remedies can be also helpful just to treat individual symptoms. Over-the-counter remedies can be things like antihistamines, decongestants, cough suppressants, all of those things and of course sometimes they are in combination like you see in NyQuil and DayQuil, but I am not promoting any particular over-the-counter medications. I am just saying, like if people are like what are these things I'm talking about, I am just giving an example. Tamiflu is a prescription antiviral medication. We sometimes use that for flu, but typically, that is something that does have to be prescribed, but it needs to be within the first 48 hours of having symptoms if it is going to really be effective. Its main purpose is to shorten that recovery period.

LG: Great. That's really good to know and helpful to have that list of different things to try if you start having symptoms. And to your point too, about tests, I think I remember seeing in the news that there is an option where you can submit your information and receive, I think, four tests maybe from the government right now. So, that might be something...

JH: Yes, I think that is the thing, and I forgot to mention that. You can purchase at home tests from retail pharmacies as well, and sometimes they can come in multiples and if you can get them, you know, certainly if you can apply for them and get them from the government where you don't have to pay anything, that would be the most ideal. Right?

LG: Right.

JH: But, if that is not an option of if you are just looking for something a little bit faster and cannot really wait on something to come in the mail, certainly you can purchase them and then you will have that second test so that when it is time to go back to work, you can retest with the second one in the packet.

LG: That definitely makes sense. So, say someone has the symptoms, they have the fever, all of these things and then they go ahead and decide to take a test. They test positive for COVID. What is expected of them as a VUMC employee specifically? I know for VU employees it might be a little different. What's the difference, and what should someone do if they test positive?

JH: So, for VUMC, essentially if you start to have symptoms of COVID, because flu does not necessarily go down this path, but COVID, we are still a little bit more specific about. It is important to notify first your supervisor and to take a COVID test. So, if the test comes back positive, this must be reported to Occupational Health, actually via REDCap survey.

The date of symptom onset is considered day zero and isolation at home is encouraged at that point for 5-10 days just depending. If you are employee that is not already immunosuppressed, which just means, you know, having pre-existing chronic illnesses that may affect your immune system in a negative way, then retesting should happen on day 4 and if symptoms improve then you can return to work on day 5. And, obviously, symptoms improve meaning no fever as well. If an employee is immunosuppressed and that means they do have preexisting chronic illnesses that may cause a negative effect on their immune system, then retesting is encouraged to be later, which would be more around day 9 and then maybe returning to work sometime around day 10 or later.

If follow-up testing continues to remain positive, so say you test on day 4 or test on day 9, and that is still positive, then there are some additional criteria that kind of helps you navigate that return-to-work circumstance and that can be found on the website as well.

LG: So, if an employee is ill, say they have some of these symptoms, but then they test negative for COVID, what are some good rules of thumb that they should use to avoid transmitting illness to coworkers, or patients, so they are negative for COVID, they still are coming to work, but they are not feeling the best, maybe?

JH: Well, I guess the best way to protect coworkers and your patients that are under the employee's care, is really just to stay home and rest. I mean, these viruses, it's hard sometimes to know whether you have COVID, flu, or just any kind of circulating virus. But I think if you are experiencing flu-like symptoms then you really just should stay home and you know, not be around other people until you are feeling better. Once you're afebrile which just means your fever is gone for 24 hours, and you know your symptoms are getting better, and you're feeling like you are able to really go back to work and handle that workload, then I think it is certainly acceptable to come back.

There are many circulating viruses this time of year, so, you know, like if you're starting to feel just like you are a little bit run down or having some issues, and you want to wear a mask, I think that is always helpful to shield others if you are worried that you might be starting to come down with something, but it is just, I wouldn't say a mask is a definitive way or protecting people from everything that you could possibly get. So, it's helpful. I do believe that.

Remaining at home to rest when sick helps the immune system to overcome invading viruses, which is great. I tell a lot of folks when the immune system goes to work, you go to sleep. You feel tired. That's all you want to do, and there is a purpose in that. It is because it is a lot of work for the immune system to do that, and it needs your energy. So, when you are resting, you're giving over that energy to the immune system so it can do that job. It not only helps you to get better faster, but it also protects the employees that are in the vicinity of you at work by not being exposed to an infection, and just keeps everybody a little bit healthier.

LG: I love that, the "when your immune system goes to work, you go to sleep." It totally makes sense. Do you have any additional information that you want to share about this flu season, anything else from OHC that you would like to share with the listeners.

JH: You know, I think the last point I want to make, and this is just kind of to play on that immune system part is really the best defense for your immune system is often a good offense. And so, what that means, is that just providing regular support to your immune system year-round is really important, and it is especially important during the flu season. Ideally, the immune system you know, just functions well and if you get consistent, adequate sleep and you know eat a proper balanced diet, but as we know, that's not always possible. And so, you know, just knowing that and keeping that in mind, I think supplementing the diet with just recommended amounts of vitamin C, vitamin D, vitamin E is really helpful along with zinc and probiotic. All of those things can be very good support for the immune system, so you know, just another way to make sure you are fine tuning things so that you know when flu season shows up, you are ready to get through it. The immune system has a big job, and like I said, you know, just doing good things to take care of ourselves, and then you know adding to it to take care of our immune system. And if we take care of our immune system, it will take care of us.

LG: Those are super helpful tips. Especially going into the winter with vitamin D, all those vitamins, just keeping ourselves healthy and supported.

Thank you so much for coming out, Julie, and sitting in the expert seat today to share with us about this. I appreciate you being willing to do this interview.

JH: Thank you, Lydia, for having me and thanks for trading me seats today, and just mixing it up a little bit. I think we have some good information to help everybody maintain their own health and I'm happy to be here.

Thanks for tuning in to Healthier You by Vanderbilt Health & Wellness. If you are a Vanderbilt University Medical Center faculty or staff member, you can earn credit on your Go for the Gold Wellness Actions blog by listening to two podcasts during season one. Simply click the Go for the Gold link in the show notes below to record your participation and stay tuned for future episodes.