



Situational Safety: The Flu & Warfarin

Patients on warfarin are at a similar risk for influenza (the flu) than people who do not take warfarin. However, warfarin patients need to remember a few important facts about the flu because it can cause temporary fluctuations in anticoagulation intensity.

The annual flu season begins in the fall and lingers until late spring. The flu is caused by a virus, dominant strains of which can change from year to year, that affects between 5% and 20% of the population each year. Symptoms of the flu range from mild to severe, resulting in the hospitalization of ~200,000 people each year and ~36,000 deaths.¹

How to prevent the flu

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends an annual flu vaccination for people at high risk. Frequent hand washing with warm, soapy water is also an effective strategy to reduce flu transmission.¹ The flu vaccine may result in a short-term elevation of INR test result, but this should not discourage patients from being vaccinated. Patients should keep all scheduled blood test appointments.

Symptoms

The flu shares many symptoms with the common cold, but is often very different. Unlike the majority of colds, the flu commonly causes high fever, chills, extreme fatigue, overall body aches, and diarrhea. Only a doctor can discriminate between a viral infection, like the flu or a cold, and a bacterial infection.

Special Considerations for patients taking warfarin

Patients should communicate their wish to receive a flu shot to their physician in late summer or early fall. They should also remain in close communication following the flu shot and report any side effects.

When battling the flu, warfarin patients often tend not to eat well or take in sufficient fluids, and may experience more stress on their body. These changes can have a temporary effect on INR values, so additional blood tests are recommended to keep patients in or near their target range.²

Prior to taking any over-the-counter products for the treatment of flu symptoms, patients taking warfarin should get approval from their healthcare provider. Approval is needed even for herbal, natural, or holistic remedies.

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- 1 *Influenza: The Disease* (2007). Retrieved June 10, 2008, from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/index.htm>
- 2 Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. (2007). *Medication Guide for Coumadin Tablets and Coumadin for Injection* [Package Insert]. Princeton, NJ: Bristol-Myers Squibb Company.

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