

Research

Can't the flu vaccine give you the flu or make you sick?

"The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu. The flu virus used in the vaccine is killed or broken when the vaccine is manufactured. The flu vaccine is given when many flu-like illnesses are already circulating in the population so, if you get sick following your flu shot, it isn't from one of the influenza strains contained in the vaccine. The 'real' influenza is a very serious illness and not to be confused with a cold or stomach illness."

Do you think the flu vaccine is really effective?

"Influenza is a very sneaky virus that changes its outer coat every year. This is why a new version of influenza vaccine has to be made and given each year. Sometimes the experts are able to make the vaccine match well to the new influenza strain, other times the match is not so good. When the match is spot on, the vaccine is very effective; when it is less well matched, it is less effective BUT still far better protection than if no influenza vaccine is taken."

"Antivirals and other off-the-shelf medications are not very effective against influenza, so the treatment for influenza is simply bed rest and lots of fluids. Influenza is quite contagious. If you're not protected by vaccine when exposed to someone incubating or having influenza, you easily become infected and then spread it to others who are not immunized in your family, at work, at school, etc. For many people, the extreme fatigue from influenza is very debilitating and disruptive to their lives, even if they do not get one of the more serious complications. It's so much easier to just get a flu shot." ●

Going viral with virus-prevention messages

With flu season just around the corner, parents and kids can fearlessly face needles with tips from IWK's pediatric pain researchers

STORY **Lindsey Bunin**

As a mother of four young children, child psychologist Dr. Christine Chambers is intimately familiar with pediatric pain.

With two decades of experience with, and research in, children's pain, she can confidently say that almost all patients with needle phobia can trace it back to one poorly managed procedure as a child. Many parents and children also avoid getting the flu shot because of the pain and fear they associate with needles. Now, she's endeavouring to put qualified research into easy-to-understand packages to better educate parents.

"As a parent I have realized that good information about pain management isn't out in the public. Most parents think that everything possible is already being done to help kids with pain, but sadly pain in children doesn't always get the discussion it deserves."

Through a fellowship in media and advocacy, Chambers developed a platform to reach parents directly about children's pain. She earned a grant through the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation — the Knowledge Sharing Support Award — to assist in producing a video for parents called "It Doesn't Have to Hurt."

Released in November 2013, the campaign was developed with the help of a team, including another IWK pediatric pain expert, Dr. Marsha Campbell Yeo, the IWK's head of infectious diseases, Dr. Scott Halperin, researchers from Sick Kids in Toronto, and Dalhousie trainees.

Boiling the information down into a 2-minute, 19-second video was a challenge for Chambers and her team who, by the very nature of their jobs, are accustomed to qualifying every last detail. They had to focus only on the critical points.

"Our research has shown us that poorly managed pain early in life does have a long-term impact on children's brains and bodies — making them more likely to feel pain," she says. "No one likes getting a needle, but 1 in 10 children develop some kind of severe needle phobia. Individuals with needle fears tend to avoid going to the doctor, and that can negatively impact their medical care for the rest of their life."

The video's strategies have evolved from research-supported interventions — Chambers and her team have written practice guidelines that were published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. It is the tip of the iceberg in Chambers' greater goal of



Watch "It Doesn't Have to Hurt" at www.bit.ly/1zRvCwj

educating parents about children's pain using social media.

"Our goal is to empower parents and let them know that there are things they can do to make their kids' pain better."

More than 40,000 views later, "It Doesn't Have to Hurt" continues to circulate as a valuable teaching tool for parents around the world, with the video having been viewed in more than 100 countries so far. At press time, a French translation of the video was being developed and Chambers' team is exploring more opportunities for videos and evolving it into a series.

"With flu shot season in full swing, we're hoping to see more shares to build momentum around this important message," Chambers says. "Getting your children vaccinated doesn't have to hurt!"

Dr. Christine Chambers is part of a team of leading children's pain researchers in the Centre for Pediatric Pain Research at the IWK. She and her colleagues are transforming our understanding of children's experiences of pain — both in hospital and during everyday life — and sharing their proven methods of alleviating children's pain. ●