

FLU JAB

Should you have it or not? Not strictly related to our mountaineering activities, but definitely is if you do not wish to miss a few weeks of the season. Let me first of all describe true influenza. It usually starts with perhaps a sore throat, but not a runny nose. Then there is intense pain in the back and probably intense headache as well. There may well be severe pain in joints. There is a profound loss of energy and it can be an effort to get from bed to bathroom. No-one fights through this to go to work, if you do, you do not have true epidemic flu.

It is rare to find adults who can remember more than 2 or 3 bouts of this illness in a life time, I once tried to go to the hospital where I was working by bus. At the bus stop I was so ill I just about managed to get home holding onto garden walls and fences. Agnes put me to bed, and after that there were 2 days which remain a complete mystery. Let us say I went to bed on a Tuesday morning and when I woke up, as I thought that afternoon, it was Thursday afternoon. Agnes had brought in the G.P and had been giving me drinks, and helping me to the loo but to me it was a complete blank. I only have her testimony for this time. The time never existed for me. That is what flu at its worst can do to you, and you will probably take at least 6 weeks to fully recover.

The vast majority of people who tell you they have had flu have not, but they have had a much less severe upper respiratory virus infection, in other words a bad cold, which granted can make you feel quite ill but not like Flu.

The really bad epidemics of flu in the early part of the last century killed millions and influenza continues to kill many thousands in Europe now, but principally those with lung and heart disease.

How do we know that these virulent strains will not re-emerge?

The microbiologists and public health officials track influenza across the world constantly, and try, with great success to predict the DNA of the virus that is likely to reach us in Western Europe. Then they set about creating a vaccine which will give maximum protection, **our flu jab**.

You will hear people say, "Oh I had that jab and went down with the 'flu'. Nonsense. They developed a cold in the season when colds were 10 a penny, and people were incubating another common cold virus at the time the flu jab was given, and nothing to do with the flu jab. (we can be incubating a viral infection for several days before symptoms break out) A few years ago, a pan European study of the flu jab in millions of people found no increase in upper respiratory viral illness in those who had had the flu jab, but a reduction, at least 80%, in those who developed Flu. The flu jab does not protect you against the common cold but neither does anything else.

There really is no scientific argument against the flu jab. You may not get flu very often but if you do, it can be devastating. **The flu jab is safe.** The flu season is approaching. **Have the jab!**

Dr Geoff