

Flu shot: Your best bet for avoiding influenza

Getting a flu shot will often protect you from coming down with the flu. And although the flu shot doesn't always provide total protection, it's worth getting.

Influenza is a respiratory infection that can cause serious complications, particularly in young children, older adults and people with certain medical conditions. Getting an influenza vaccine — though not 100% effective — is the best way to prevent the misery of the flu and its complications. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends annual flu vaccination for everyone age 6 months or older.

Here are the answers to common questions about flu shots:

WHEN IS THE FLU VACCINE AVAILABLE?

The availability of the flu vaccine depends on when production is completed. But generally, shipments begin sometime in August in the United States. Doctors and nurses may begin vaccinating people as soon as the flu vaccine is available in their areas.

It takes up to two weeks to build immunity after a flu shot, but you can benefit from the vaccine even if you don't get it until after the flu season starts. It's usually best for people in the United States to get their flu vaccine in September and October, and aim to get it by the end of October. However, you can still protect yourself against late flu outbreaks if you get the vaccine in February or later.

WHY DO I NEED TO GET VACCINATED EVERY YEAR?

Because flu viruses evolve so quickly, last year's vaccine may not protect you from this year's viruses. New flu vaccines are released every year to keep up with rapidly adapting flu viruses.

When you get vaccinated, your immune system produces antibodies to protect you from the viruses included in the vaccine. But antibody levels may decline over time — another reason to get a flu shot every year.

WHO SHOULD GET THE FLU VACCINE?

The CDC recommends annual influenza vaccinations for everyone age 6 months or older. Vaccination is especially important for people at high risk of influenza complications, including:

- Pregnant women
- Older adults
- Young children
- People with weakened immune systems

Children between 6 months and 8 years may need two doses of the flu vaccine, given at least four weeks apart, the first time they are given a flu vaccine. After that, they can receive single annual doses of the flu vaccine. A 2017 study showed that the vaccine significantly reduces a child's risk of dying of the flu. Check with your child's doctor.



Chronic medical conditions also can increase your risk of influenza complications. Examples include:

- Asthma
- Cancer or cancer treatment
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Heart disease
- Cystic fibrosis
- Diabetes
- Brain or nervous system conditions
- HIV/AIDS
- Kidney or liver disease
- Obesity
- Stroke

In the last 10 years, flu vaccine prevented:



Source: CDC

Anyone with a chronic medical condition should get the flu vaccine. Also, people living in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities should get the flu vaccine.

Check with your doctor before receiving a flu vaccine if:

- **You had a severe reaction to a previous flu vaccine.** The flu vaccine isn't recommended for anyone who had a severe reaction to a previous flu vaccine. Check with your doctor first, though. Some reactions might not be related to the vaccine.

If you have an egg allergy, you can still receive the flu vaccine.

WHAT ARE MY FLU VACCINE DELIVERY OPTIONS?

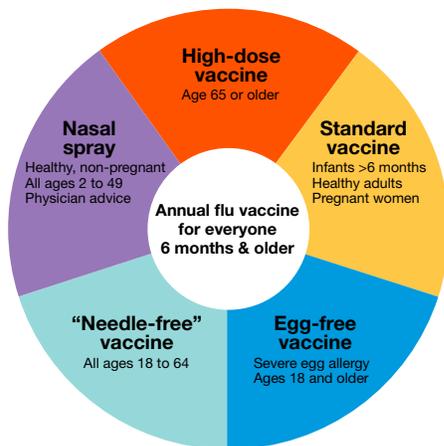
The flu vaccine will be available as an injection or as a nasal spray.

The nasal spray vaccine is approved for people between 2 and 49 years old.

The nasal flu vaccine isn't recommended for some people, including:

- Children under 2
- Adults 50 and older
- Pregnant women
- Children between 2 and 17 years old who are taking aspirin or a salicylate-containing medication
- People with weakened immune systems
- Kids 2 to 4 years old who have had asthma or wheezing in the past 12 months

The flu vaccine can also be delivered by an injection that's usually given in a muscle in the arm. If you're an adult under 65, you may also choose an in-the-skin (intradermal) vaccine, or you may prefer to have your vaccine delivered using a jet injector device, which uses a high-pressure, narrow stream of fluid to penetrate the skin instead of a needle.



CAN THE VACCINE GIVE ME THE FLU OR OTHER RESPIRATORY DISEASES?

No. The flu vaccine can't give you the flu. It also does not increase your risk of COVID-19. But you might develop flu-like symptoms — despite getting a flu vaccine — for a variety of reasons, including:

- **Reaction to the vaccine.**
- **The two-week window.**
- **Mismatched flu viruses.** In some years, the influenza viruses used for the vaccine don't match the viruses circulating during the flu season. If this occurs, your flu shot will be less effective, but may still offer some protection.
- **Other illnesses.** Many other illnesses, such as the common cold, also produce flu-like symptoms. So, you may think you have the flu when you actually don't.

Even when the vaccine doesn't completely prevent the flu, it may lessen the severity of your illness, and reduce the risk of serious complications and serious illness requiring hospitalization.

