Flu (Influenza) and the Vaccine to Prevent It

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The best way to protect against the flu is by getting the flu vaccine. Doctors recommend that all children 6 months and older get the vaccine every year.

Why should my child get the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine:

- Protects your child from flu, a potentially serious illness
- Prevents your child from spreading flu to others, including babies younger than 6 months who are too young to get the vaccine
- Keeps your child from missing school or childcare (and keeps you from missing work to care for your child)

Is the flu vaccine safe?

Yes. Flu vaccines are safe. Flu vaccines have been used in the United States for more than 50 years. During that time, hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received seasonal flu vaccines. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects, but, most people who get the flu vaccine have no side effects at all.

What are the side effects?

Most children don't have any side effects from the vaccine, but it can cause mild side effects. For example, people vaccinated with the flu shot may feel achy and may have a sore arm where the shot was given. People vaccinated with the nasal spray flu vaccine may have a stuffy nose and sore throat. These side effects are NOT the flu. If experienced at all, these effects are usually mild and last only 1-2 days.

There are two kinds of flu vaccines:

- The shot is usually given in the arm. Children 6 months to 2 years old should get the shot.
- The nasal spray is for children who are 2 years of age or older without medical problems (like asthma) and no history of wheezing.

What is the flu?

The flu—short for influenza—is an illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu viruses infect the nose, throat and lungs. Flu spreads easily and can cause serious problems, especially for very young children, older people, pregnant women, and people with certain long-term medical conditions like asthma and diabetes.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Flu symptoms can include the following:

- Fever (not everyone with the flu has a fever)
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea (in some children)

Most people who get influenza recover in a few days to less than two weeks. Some people develop complications (such as pneumonia) that can result in hospitalization and even death.

Doctors recommend that your child get the flu vaccine every year starting when he is 6 months old. Some children 6 months through 8 years of age may need 2 doses for best protection.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES USA

CDC CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS
STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

American Academy of Pediatrics
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Is it serious?

The flu can be mild or very serious. We can't be sure who will have a mild case and who will become very sick. We do know that in the United States, each year an average of 20,000 children younger than 5 years old need hospital care because of flu complications. Children with long-term medical conditions and children younger than 5 (and especially younger than 2 years old) are more likely to end up in the hospital from the flu.

Flu seasons vary in how serious they are from one year to another. Since 2004, the total number of flu-associated deaths in children has ranged from 35 to 171 per season. This range doesn't include the 2009 pandemic season, when states reported 348 deaths in children to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some of the more serious complications from the flu include:

- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids)
- Worsening of long-term medical conditions, like asthma and diabetes

How does the flu spread?

Flu spreads when people who have the flu talk, cough, or sneeze, and droplets of saliva that have the virus in them land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. You may also get the flu by touching an object with flu virus on it—like a doorknob or used tissue—and then touching your own eyes, nose, or mouth. People can spread the flu to others from one day before they have symptoms to 5-7 days after they get sick. This can be longer in children and people who are very sick.

People who have the flu should stay home and away from others (except to go to the doctor) until 24 hours after their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

Can my child get the flu from the flu vaccine?

No, the vaccine does not cause the flu. The flu vaccine protects your child from the flu. However, the vaccine can sometimes cause mild side effects that may be mistaken for the flu. Keep in mind that it will take about 2 weeks after getting his vaccine for your child to build protection against the flu.

Why does my child need a flu vaccine every year?

Flu viruses are constantly changing, so a new vaccine is made each year to protect against the flu viruses that are likely to cause the most illness. Also, protection provided by the vaccine wears off over time. Your child's flu vaccine will protect against the flu all season, but vaccination will be needed again the next flu season.

Where can I learn more about flu vaccine and my child?

To learn more about the flu vaccine, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents.

How can I protect my child against the flu?

- Get your flu vaccine while you are pregnant. This can help protect your baby in the first 6 months of his life, before he can get his own flu vaccine.
- Get your vaccine every year, and ask your baby's caregivers to get vaccinated as well.
- Make sure your child gets his dose(s) of flu vaccine soon after it's available each season.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.

Influenza (Flu) Fact Sheet

What Everyone Should Know About Flu and the Flu Vaccine

What is the flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications.

Every year in the United States:

- On average more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- More than 23,600 people die from flu (with a range of 3,349-48,614 people); about 90% of such deaths occur in persons aged 65 years and older.

The best way to prevent this illness is by getting a flu vaccination.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

The flu usually starts suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults

* It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

What are the complications associated with the flu?

Some of the complications caused by flu include pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease, asthma or diabetes.

How is the flu spread?

The flu is spread in droplets released by coughing and sneezing. It usually spreads from person to person, though occasionally people may be infected by touching something with virus on it and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the flu?

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

Cold Versus Flu

What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because colds and flu share many symptoms, it can be difficult (or even impossible) to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Most people who have flu symptoms will not be tested, and do not need to be tested, because test results usually do not change how a patient is treated. Treatment, if decided upon by the health care provider, will usually be based on severity of symptoms and how likely a person is to have complications of flu – not on the basis of a test result.

What are the symptoms of the flu versus the symptoms of a cold?

- The flu tends to start very suddenly, while colds tend to develop gradually.
- The flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and dry cough are more common and intense.
- People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose.
- Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

Preventing the Flu

What is the best way to protect myself against the flu?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination each fall. There are two types of vaccines:

- The **"flu shot"** is an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. It can be given in the muscle or just under the skin. The flu shot that is given in the muscle is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions. The flu shot that is given below the skin is for those 18-64 years of age.
- The **nasal-spray flu vaccine** is a vaccine (sometimes called LAIV for "Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine") made with live, weakened flu viruses that **do not** cause the flu. LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 2 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

Talk to your provider to find out which vaccine is right for you and your family.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against flu virus infection for the entire season. Flu vaccines will not protect against illnesses caused by other viruses, such as the common cold.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

Everyone 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated against the flu. Vaccination should begin as soon as the vaccine is available.

Vaccination to prevent flu is particularly important for persons who are at increased risk for severe complications from flu or at higher risk for flu-related outpatient, emergency department, or hospital visits. The list below includes the groups of people more likely to get flu-related complications if they get sick from influenza:

- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years of age
- Adults 50 years of age and older, but especially those 65 years of age and older
- Women who are or will be pregnant during flu season
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities
- People who have the following medical conditions:
    - Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy (seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability (mental retardation), moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury].
    - Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis) and Asthma
    - Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
    - Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)

In certain circumstances, your doctor or health care provider might prescribe antiviral drugs to help reduce the severity and duration of your illness. Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter and are different from antibiotics. You can get them only if you have a prescription from your doctor or health care provider. Your health care provider can help decide whether you should take an antiviral drug, and, if so, which one you should take.

Antiviral drugs are a second line of defense to treat the flu if you get sick. NYSDOH recommends flu vaccination as the first and best way to prevent influenza.

Persons Recommended for Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

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    - Chronic lung disease [such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and cystic fibrosis] and asthma;
    - Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease);
    - Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease);
    - Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus);
    - Kidney disorders;
    - Liver disorders;
    - Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders);
    - Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids);
    - People younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy;
    - People who are morbidly obese (Body Mass Index, or BMI, of 40 or greater).

Vaccination efforts should also focus on delivering vaccination to the following persons:

- Health care personnel;
- Household contacts and caregivers of children younger than 5 years and adults aged 50 years or older, with particular emphasis on vaccinating contacts of children younger than 6 months.

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Does my child need to receive more than one dose of flu vaccine this season?

Some children aged 6 months through 8 years require two doses of flu vaccine (given a minimum of four weeks apart). Children in this age group who are getting vaccinated for the first time will need two doses. If this is not the first season that your child is receiving flu vaccine, talk with your child's provider to determine how many doses your child needs to protect them from the flu this year.

Who should NOT be vaccinated?

There are some people who should not be vaccinated. They include:

- People who have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccination;
- Children less than 6 months of age.

Some people should wait to get vaccinated until they talk with their provider. They include:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs;
- People who are sick with a fever. (These people can get vaccinated once their symptoms lessen. People with a mild illness can usually get the vaccine.)
- People who developed Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of getting flu vaccine.

What other methods can help prevent the flu?

Although the single best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year, good health habits often can help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like the flu.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- Stay home when you are sick. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Cover your mouth and nose. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- Clean your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Practice other good health habits. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

Can the flu be treated?