

# Influenza (Flu) Vaccine: What You should know

**The best way to protect against influenza is to get a flu vaccine every flu season.**

## Why get vaccinated against influenza (flu)?

Flu is a contagious respiratory disease that can lead to serious illness, hospitalization, or even death. Every flu season is different, and influenza infection can affect people differently. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. The first and most important step in protecting against flu is to get a flu vaccine each season. CDC recommends everyone six months and older get an annual flu vaccine. For the 2016-2017 season, CDC recommends an injectable flu shot (inactivated influenza vaccine or recombinant influenza vaccine). The nasal spray flu vaccine (live attenuated influenza vaccine or LAIV) should not be used during 2016-2017.



It is important to get your flu vaccine EVERY year, because

1. Flu viruses are constantly changing, so flu vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the viruses that research suggests will be most common during the upcoming flu season.
2. A person's immune protection from the flu vaccine declines over time. Yearly vaccination is needed for the best protection.

## Who should get a flu vaccine?

**Everyone is at risk for seasonal influenza. CDC recommends everyone six months and older get a flu vaccine.**

While flu can make anyone sick, certain people are at high risk of serious flu complications. This includes:

- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 5 years, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- People 65 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions

The full list of people who are at high risk of serious flu complications is at [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high\\_risk.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm)

It also is important that people who live with or care for those at high risk of serious flu complications get vaccinated, including:

- Health care workers
- Contacts of persons at high risk for serious flu complications, including children younger than 6 months of age who are too young to be vaccinated.

Some children 6 months to 8 years of age may need 2 doses of flu vaccine to be protected. Ask your doctor how many doses your child needs. For a complete list, see "Who Should Get Vaccinated Against Influenza" at [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high\\_risk.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm)

## Some people should NOT get a flu vaccine

Tell the person who is giving you the vaccine:

- If you have any severe, life-threatening allergies. If you ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of flu vaccine, or have a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine, you may be advised not to get vaccinated.



**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention**  
National Center for Immunization  
and Respiratory Diseases

Most, but not all, types of flu vaccine contain a small amount of egg protein. People who are allergic to eggs can get the flu vaccine, but tell your provider about your allergy.

- If you ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome (also called GBS). Some people with a history of GBS should not get this vaccine. This should be discussed with your doctor.
- If you are not feeling well. It is usually okay to get flu vaccine when you have a mild illness, but you might be asked to come back when you feel better.

**Children younger than 6 months are at high risk of serious flu illness, but are too young to get a flu vaccine. If you live with or care for an infant younger than 6 months of age, you should get a flu vaccine to protect the infant, yourself, and others.**

If you have questions about whether you should get a flu vaccine, consult your doctor or health care provider.

For a complete list, see “Who Should Get Vaccinated Against Influenza” at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/whoshouldvax.htm>

### When to Get Vaccinated

**Fall is the time to get your annual flu vaccine. If possible, get your flu vaccine by the end of October!**

However, as long as flu viruses are circulating, it’s not too late to get vaccinated.

The timing of flu outbreaks is unpredictable. Seasonal flu outbreaks can happen as early as October and last as late as May. It is best to get vaccinated before influenza viruses start to spread in your community since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu.

Flu vaccines are offered in many doctors’ offices and clinics. Even if you don’t have a regular doctor or nurse, you can get a flu vaccine at other places like your local health department, a pharmacy, an urgent care clinic, and maybe your school, college health center, or workplace.

### What kinds of flu vaccines are recommended?

There are several licensed and recommended flu vaccine options this season. This includes flu vaccines made to protect against three different flu viruses (called “trivalent” vaccines) as well as flu vaccines made to protect against four different flu viruses (called “quadrivalent” vaccines). There is a high dose vaccine and a flu vaccine made with adjuvant. There also is cell-based vaccine and recombinant influenza vaccine. CDC does not recommend the use of the nasal spray vaccine (FluMist Quadrivalent) this season. Otherwise, there is no preference for any licensed and recommended vaccine over another.

### What are the benefits of getting the flu vaccine?

- Protection for yourself (Reduce your risk of getting sick or being hospitalized)
- Protection for pregnant women and their newborns.
- Protection for children younger than 6 months who are too young to get vaccinated.
- Protection for other people at high risk of serious complications from flu.

Flu seasons are unpredictable and can be severe. While the numbers vary, in the United States, millions of people are sickened, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized and thousands or tens of thousands of people die from flu every year.

### What are the side effects of the flu vaccine?

Flu shots are safe and cannot give you the flu, but there may be some mild side effects. The most common side effects from the flu shot are soreness, redness, tenderness, or swelling where the shot is given.

**Everyone 6 months of age and older is recommended to get vaccinated against the flu.** A flu vaccine reduces your risk of illness and hospitalization and can prevent you from spreading the virus to your loved ones. Protect yourself and your family from flu: get vaccinated.

For more information about the seriousness of influenza and the benefits of influenza vaccination, talk to your doctor or nurse, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu), or call CDC at **1-800-CDC-INFO**.