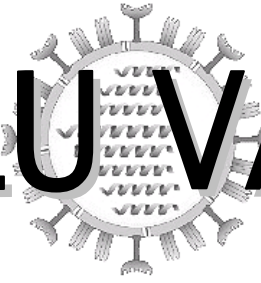




THE FLU VACCINE



WHAT IS THE FLU?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza (flu) viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness; sometimes, it can even cause death. A flu vaccination can help protect you from certain flu viruses.

Every year in the United States, five to twenty percent of the population becomes infected with the flu. Of those infected, more than 200,000 are hospitalized because of flu-related complications and about 36,000 people die from the flu.

Elderly people, young children, and individuals with certain health conditions are at a high risk for serious flu complications.

WHAT ARE FLU SYMPTOMS?

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, are more common in children than adults



Flu complications include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Children may develop sinus problems and ear infections.

HOW DOES THE FLU SPREAD?

The flu spreads when a sick person coughs or sneezes and sends virus particles into the air; nearby individuals become infected by inhaling these particles. In addition to inhalation, people can become infected with the flu when they touch something (such as a door knob, countertop, dollar bill, etc.) with flu viruses on it and then immediately touch their mouths or noses.

AFTER EXPOSURE, WHEN SHOULD I EXPECT TO HAVE FLU SYMPTOMS?

Did you know that you can pass the flu onto someone else before you even know you are sick?

Infected individuals can develop flu symptoms one to four days after virus exposure; however, most people show symptoms two days after exposure.

Adults can be contagious the day before symptoms appear and for five days after. Children can be contagious several days before their symptoms appear and for up to ten days after. Those who are severely immunocompromised can be contagious for weeks to months after having the flu.

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HOW YOU CAN REDUCE YOUR ODDS OF GETTING THE FLU?

Getting a yearly flu vaccination is the best way to reduce your chances of getting the flu. The following are the two types of flu vaccines:

The Flu Shot – a vaccine made with killed (dead) viruses; it is introduced into the patient through an injection. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.

The Nasal-Spray Flu Vaccine – a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause flu symptoms; it is introduced into the patient through a nasal spray. This vaccine is sometimes called LAIV for “Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine”. LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against influenza-like illnesses caused by other viruses.

WHEN SHOULD YOU GET VACCINATED?

The best time to get vaccinated is in October or November; however, getting vaccinated in December, or even later, can still be beneficial.



WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED?

1. **People at high risk for flu complications** – this group includes anyone that has one of the following risk factors:
 - Being age 65 years and older
 - Living in a nursing home or long-term care facility
 - Having a chronic heart or lung condition
 - Having a condition that makes it difficult to breathe or swallow, such as a brain injury or disease, spinal cord injury, seizure disorder, or nerve or muscle disorder
 - Needing regular medical care, or being hospitalized during the previous year, for a metabolic disease (like diabetes), chronic kidney disease, severe anemia, or a weakened immune system
 - Women who will be pregnant during the flu season
2. **People 50 to 64 years of age**
3. **People in close contact with someone at high-risk for flu complications** (see above) - this includes all health care workers and close contacts of people 65 years and older or of children 6 to 23 months of age
4. **People who want to reduce their odds of getting the flu**

WHO SHOULD NOT GET VACCINATED?

1. People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs
2. People who have had a severe reaction to an flu vaccination in the past
3. People who have developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) after receiving a flu vaccination
4. People who have an illness accompanied by a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms subside

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO PREVENT THE FLU?

WASH your hands often

COVER coughs or sneezes

STAY at home if you are ill

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