

Audience: Everyone 6 months and older

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CDC 2014-2015 Flu Season

Flu Vaccination: The Best Way to Protect Yourself and the Ones You Love from Flu

Have you gotten your flu vaccine this season? If not, now's the time. An annual flu vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu as well as flu-related complications that could lead to severe illness, hospitalization and even death. Health experts across the country recommend that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine. Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctors' visits, missed work and school due to flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations and deaths.

Influenza is among the most common respiratory illnesses in the United States, infecting millions of people every flu season. Every year, flu spreads across the country, from person to person, among families and communities. The severity of flu illness can vary from mild to severe. CDC estimates that from the 1976-1977 season to the 2006-2007 flu season, flu-associated deaths in the United States ranged from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people. And each season it's estimated that more than 200,000 people are hospitalized because of flu-related complications.

Over the years, the number of people recommended for flu vaccination has grown as experts have learned more about who is at high risk from flu complications or who bears the greatest burden of illness and is likely to spread flu in the community. Scientists and public health experts have come to recognize that while the flu is particularly dangerous for certain people, it can cause severe illness and even death for anyone, regardless of whether or not they are "high risk." Even healthy children and young adults can get very sick from the flu.

"One of the greatest challenges we face from the flu is the uncertainty of the disease," explains Dr. Anne Schuchat, Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Flu viruses are constantly changing. Each flu season, different flu viruses can spread, and they can affect people differently based on their body's ability to fight infection." Since flu viruses are constantly changing and immunity declines over time, annual vaccination is needed for optimal protection.

People with certain long-term health conditions are at high risk of serious flu complications. During the 2013-2014 flu season, 89 percent of reported adult hospitalizations from flu had at least one underlying medical condition that increased their risk for flu complications; as did 60 percent of the reported flu hospitalizations in children. Asthma, diabetes and chronic heart disease are examples of long-term health conditions.

While the flu vaccine is the best way to prevent flu, how well the vaccine works can vary. Sometimes, people who are vaccinated still get flu. For that reason, CDC recommends that if you are at high risk of serious flu complications and get flu symptoms, you should get in touch with your doctor or another health care professional. If you do have the flu, your doctor may write you a prescription for a flu antiviral drug. Treatment with flu antiviral drugs can mean the difference between having a milder illness versus a very serious illness that could result in a hospital stay. For a list of people at high risk, see http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm.

There are a small group of people who should not get a flu vaccine; for instance, people who have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine or any of its components in the past. For more information about who should and who should not get vaccinated, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/whoshouldvax.htm>.

Getting a flu vaccine is more convenient than ever before. Vaccines are available in a variety of locations, for example, from your doctor or local health department, and at many pharmacies. Many employers, schools, and retail stores also offer flu vaccines. Additionally, there are several [vaccine options](#) available this season. Use the vaccine finder at <http://vaccine.healthmap.org/> to find a flu vaccination clinic near you. Call ahead to confirm availability for any specific vaccine options.

Most health insurance plans cover the cost of recommended vaccines. Check with your insurance provider for details of coverage. If you do not currently have health insurance, visit www.HealthCare.gov to learn more about affordable health coverage options. For more information about influenza or vaccination, talk to your doctor or other health care professional, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). For more information about the flu vaccine, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu> or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).