

Audience: Young Adults (19–24 years)

CDC: 2011-2012 Flu Season

Word Count: 557

Don't Wait – Vaccinate

Stress about school, work, roommates or even your social life can really bring you down. But so can a prolonged serious illness, like can happen with the flu. The flu is unpredictable, and can affect us when we least expect it. If you or your friends get the flu, the results could be missed classes, missed work, or far worse--trips to the ER, hospitalization, and even death.

Even if you are generally a healthy person, you can get sick from the flu. You can also spread the virus to others, even before showing any symptoms. Keep in mind that if you have certain long-term medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes (type 1 or type 2), even when well-managed, you are considered to be at high risk for flu complications. The flu can lead to complications such as pneumonia and bronchitis and can make chronic health problems worse.

Luckily, protecting yourself from the flu is easy. The first step: get a flu vaccine. An annual flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older and is especially important for those at high risk for flu complications. Even if you were vaccinated against the flu last season, you still need a flu vaccine *this season* because immunity from vaccination declines over time.

You have several options when it comes to the type of vaccine to get and where to get it.

A regular flu shot is approved for most people ages 6 months and older. The new intradermal flu shot—which is injected into the skin instead of the muscle using a much smaller needle—is approved for most people 18 to 64 years of age. The nasal spray vaccine is approved for use in healthy people, 2 through 49 years of age, who are not pregnant.

Think you can't fit getting a vaccine into your schedule? Well think again! It's more convenient than ever to get a flu vaccine. Most pharmacies, drugstores, and supermarkets offer walk-in clinics that are usually very quick and have convenient hours. If you're in school, most university clinics offer their students flu vaccines for free, or at a reduced price. But the longer you wait, the more you increase your chances of getting the flu.

Contrary to urban legend, the flu vaccine cannot cause the flu. Very mild flu-like symptoms after vaccination can mean that your body is responding to vaccination. If you actually get the flu soon after vaccination, you may have been exposed to flu before getting vaccinated, or during the two-week period it takes the body to gain protection after getting vaccinated. Flu-like symptoms also can be the result of non-influenza illness with similar symptoms like rhinovirus (common cold) or other viruses or bacteria that share flu symptoms.

The few minutes it will take you to get a flu vaccine is much shorter than the days you might have to take off from school and/or work if you get sick with the flu. It's important to get your vaccine early, to be fully protected by the time flu outbreaks really pick up. By protecting yourself with a flu vaccine, you'll help protect your family, friends, classmates, and co-workers, too. And that's even better than "friending" them on your favorite social networking site.

For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>, <http://www.flu.gov>, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).

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