

# Influenza (Flu) Vaccines

## Addressing Common Questions about Influenza Vaccination for Adults

### What disease does flu vaccine protect against?

Seasonal influenza (flu) vaccines protect against seasonal influenza viruses that circulate among people annually. The flu is a contagious respiratory disease that spreads around the United States every fall and winter, usually beginning in October and lasting as late as May. Flu vaccines are made to protect against the three or four different flu viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.

### How common is this disease?

Flu is very common in the United States in the fall and winter. Millions of people get sick, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized, and tens of thousands of people die from flu every year.

### How is this disease spread?

Flu is spread mainly by droplets made in the air when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. A person might also get flu by touching an object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth or nose.

### Who is at risk for this disease?

Anyone can get the flu. Even healthy people can get sick with the flu and spread it to others. While everyone 6 months of age and older should get the flu vaccine each season, it is especially important for people who are at increased risk for severe complications from influenza. People who are at high risk of developing serious complications (like pneumonia) if they get sick with the flu include:

- People who have certain medical conditions such as asthma or other lung disease, diabetes, and heart disease
- Pregnant women
- Children younger than age 5 years (especially those younger than 2 years)
- Older adults age 65 years and older

A complete list is available at [People Who Are at High Risk of Developing Flu-Related Complications \(www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high\\_risk.htm\)](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm).

### What could happen if I get this disease?

Symptoms of flu come on suddenly and may last several days. They can include:

- Fever\* or feeling feverish/chills
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches
- Fatigue
- Cough
- Headache
- Runny or stuffy nose

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

Most people who get the flu will have mild illness, will not need medical care or influenza antiviral drugs, and will recover in less than two weeks. Although severe illness from flu infection can occur in persons of all ages, some people are more likely to get flu complications that result in hospitalization, and occasionally death. Pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus infections and ear infections are examples of flu-related complications. Flu can also worsen illness related to heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic health problems. For example, people with [asthma](#) may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with [chronic heart disease](#) may experience a worsening of this condition triggered by flu.

For more information on this and other vaccines for adults, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults).

DON'T WAIT.  
VACCINATE!



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

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## Who should get flu vaccine? When and how often is it needed?

Everyone 6 months and older is recommended to get vaccinated against influenza every year, including pregnant women. It is best to get vaccinated soon after vaccine becomes available each autumn. There are two reasons for annual vaccination. First, flu viruses often change, so each year's flu vaccines are made to protect against the flu viruses expected to cause the most illness that year. The second reason is because a person's immune protection from vaccination declines over time.

There are several flu vaccine options available during the flu season. Adults should talk with their doctors to learn which vaccines are recommended for them. The important thing is to get a flu vaccine every year.

## Who should not get flu vaccine?

Some adults, including those with a severe allergy to any part of the vaccine, should not get vaccinated against flu. Some people with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralyzing illness, also called GBS) also should not get a flu vaccine. People who have a moderate-to-severe illness with or without a fever should wait until they recover before getting vaccinated.

## How does flu vaccine work?

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. Traditional flu vaccines (called "trivalent" vaccines) are made to protect against three flu viruses; an influenza A (H1N1) virus, an influenza A (H3N2) virus, and an influenza B virus. There are also flu vaccines made to protect against four flu viruses (called "quadrivalent" vaccines). These vaccines protect against the same viruses as the trivalent vaccine and an additional B virus.

## How safe is flu vaccine?

Over the years, millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines. CDC and FDA closely monitor the safety of seasonal influenza vaccines and other vaccines licensed for use in the United States.

### Is it safe to get if I have certain health conditions or am taking prescription meds?

People who have had a severe (life-threatening) allergy or reaction to a previous flu vaccine should not be vaccinated. People who have an allergy to eating eggs should discuss flu vaccination with their doctor. Many egg-allergic individuals can safely receive influenza vaccine. It is safe for people taking prescription medications to get flu vaccines.

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

Different side effects can be associated with flu shots. These side effects are usually mild and short-lasting (1-2 days following vaccination), especially when compared with the duration of symptoms from influenza infection.

Following inactivated ("killed") or recombinant flu vaccines, some minor side effects that can occur are soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given, fever (low-grade), and aches. A person cannot get the flu from a flu vaccine.

If these problems occur, they begin soon after vaccination and are mild and short-lived. Almost all people who receive influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it. However, on rare occasions, flu vaccination can cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reaction.

## Where can I get the vaccine?

Adults can get flu vaccine at doctors' offices, pharmacies, workplaces, health clinics, and health departments. Check with your doctor or pharmacist or use the [Adult Vaccine Finder \(vaccine.healthmap.org\)](http://vaccine.healthmap.org) to help you find places that provide flu vaccines near you.

## How much does the vaccine cost?

Most health insurance, including Medicare, covers flu vaccine. Check with your insurance provider for details on whether there is any cost to you and for a list of in-network immunization providers. If you do not have health insurance or are otherwise not able to afford the flu vaccine, contact your local or state health department immunization program to find out how you can get the vaccine.