

Flu (Influenza)

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What is flu?

Flu—short for influenza—is an illness of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. It spreads easily and can cause serious problems, especially for very young children, older people and people with certain long-term medical conditions like asthma and diabetes. The flu vaccine can protect against this disease.

What are the symptoms of flu?

Flu symptoms usually include the following:

- Fever (not everyone with flu has a fever)
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness

Some children with flu will vomit or have diarrhea.

Symptoms come on suddenly, about 2 days after contact with the virus. Some people get better in a few days, others can be sick for weeks. People can spread flu from one day before symptoms begin to 5-7 days after. This can be longer in children and severely ill individuals.

How serious is flu?

Flu can be mild or very serious. Flu seasons also vary in severity from one year to another. Between 1976 and 2006, estimated annual deaths in the United States from flu ranged from about 3,000 to 49,000.

Complications from flu include:

- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids)
- Worsening of long-term medical conditions, like asthma and diabetes

People who get serious complications from flu often need care in the hospital.

Benefits of the flu vaccine

- Saves lives.
- Protects against serious disease.
- Protects against complications from flu.
- Helps protect others.

Side effects of the flu shot

The most common side effects are usually mild and include the following:

- Redness, swelling, and sore arm from the shot
- Fever, muscle aches

Side effects of the nose spray flu vaccine

The most common side effects are usually mild and include:

- Runny, stuffy nose
- Fever, headache, muscle aches
- Cough or wheezing
- Stomach ache or diarrhea

In the United States each year an average of 20,000 children younger than 5 years old need hospital care because of flu complications. Hospitalization rates are higher for children with long-term medical conditions, and babies and children younger than 2 years.

How does flu spread?

Flu spreads when infected people cough or sneeze. You may also get flu by touching an object with flu virus on it—like a doorknob or used tissue—and then touching your own eyes, nose, or mouth.

People who have the flu should stay home (except to seek medical care) until 24 hours after their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.



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What is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine helps protect against flu. There are two kinds of flu vaccines: the shot, given with a needle usually in the arm, and the nose spray. Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every year.

There are many different types of flu viruses, and the viruses are always changing. Each year, scientists try to match the viruses in the vaccine to those that are most likely to make people sick in the coming year.

Because flu viruses are always changing, last season's flu vaccine may not protect against newer viruses, and annual vaccination is the only way to maintain protection each season. The flu vaccine provides protection that lasts throughout the flu season.

Which flu vaccine should my child get?

Healthy children ages 2 and older can get the nose spray vaccine. Children 6 months to 2 years, those who have experienced wheezing in the past year, and children with long-term medical conditions (which includes asthma) should get the shot instead. Neither vaccine can cause flu because the viruses are killed or weakened.

Babies younger than 6 months are too young to get either vaccine but they can be protected from maternal vaccination (if the mother is vaccinated) during pregnancy, and by being sure that everyone around them has received the flu vaccine.

When should my child get the flu vaccine?

Everyone should get the flu vaccine as soon as it is available each year. The body takes 2 weeks to build protection against flu after getting the vaccine, and protection lasts throughout the flu season.

Some children younger than 9 years will need two doses of the vaccine to be fully protected. Ask your child's doctor how many doses they need. The flu vaccine can be given at the same time as other childhood vaccines.

Why should my child get the flu vaccine?

Even healthy children can get flu and spread it to others. Getting your child the flu vaccine is the most important thing you can do to protect them from flu and its possible complications. It can also help protect others, including babies younger than 6 months who are too young to get the vaccine.

What can I do to protect my child from flu?

- ✓ Get your child, yourself and the rest of your family a flu vaccine every year.
- ✓ Keep your child away from people who are sick.
- ✓ Talk with your child's doctor if you have questions.
- ✓ Keep a record of your child's vaccinations to make sure your child is up-to-date.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received seasonal flu vaccines. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Most people who get the flu vaccine have no side effects. Those that do occur are almost always mild, like a sore arm where the shot was given or a fever. Serious side effects are very rare.

If my child does not get the flu vaccine, will he get flu?

Without the flu vaccine, your child is at higher risk of getting flu. Children are the most likely age group to get flu.

Among children younger than five years old, flu is a common cause for doctor visits and trips to urgent care centers.

Where can I learn more about the flu vaccine?

To learn more about the flu vaccine or other vaccines, talk to your child's doctor.

Call **800-CDC-INFO** (800-232-4636) or go to <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines> and check out the following resources:

- Key Facts about Seasonal Flu: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>
- Common Questions Parents Ask about Infant Immunizations: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/infants/parent-questions.htm>
- Vaccines website for parents: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive the flu vaccine every year.