

The Flu Vaccine

Overview

Understanding the “flu shot” and who needs it.

- Getting the vaccine
- Who should get the vaccine?
- People who should *not* get the flu vaccine

Getting the flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available is an important step in protecting you and your family throughout the 2011–2012 flu season.

Getting the vaccine

Beginning in the fall, the flu vaccine may be available at many locations in your area -- vaccination clinics, pharmacies, doctors’ offices. Contact your health care provider to find out when and where you can get vaccinated and to ask any questions you have about the vaccine. You can also use the Flu Shot Locator on www.flu.gov to find out where flu vaccines are offered in your area.

There are two kinds of flu vaccines:

- *The “flu shot.”* This consists of an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) given with a needle. The flu shot is approved for use in adults and children 6 months of age and older, including healthy people, people with chronic medical conditions, and pregnant women. A higher-strength flu shot is available for adults 65 years of age and older.
- *The nasal-spray flu vaccine.* The nasal-spray vaccine is made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu. This spray is sometimes called LAIV for “Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine.” LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 2 to 49 years of age who are not pregnant. People with asthma or a weakened immune system (as a result of lupus, cancer, having had a kidney transplant, or other conditions) should not get the nasal-spray vaccine. If someone in your household has a weakened immune system, check with your health care provider to see whether others in your household may be vaccinated with this nasal spray.

About two weeks after you get vaccinated, your body develops antibodies that protect you against influenza virus infection. A flu vaccine will not protect against flu-like illnesses caused by noninfluenza viruses. Neither strain of the flu vaccine will cause you to become ill with the flu viruses.

The 2011–2012 flu vaccine protects against the three influenza viruses that scientists expect to be most common this year -- influenza A (H3N2) virus, an influenza B virus, and the 2009 H1N1 virus. These are the same strains that were contained in the 2010–2011 vaccine.

Who should get the vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/flu/)

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recommends that, with certain exceptions, everyone over the age of 6 months get the flu vaccine.

Because they have a higher risk of developing flu-related problems, or live with or care for people who have a higher risk, it is especially important that people in the following groups get vaccinated:

- pregnant women
- children younger than 5 years old, and especially those younger than 2 years old (If this is their first year to receive the vaccine, children 8 years of age and under may need two doses.)
- people who are 65 years old or older
- people who have certain medical conditions, including asthma, neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, kidney disorders, endocrine disorders, liver disorders, metabolic disorders, a weakened immune system (due to medication or disease), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), people who are morbidly obese (have a body mass index of over 30), and those under 19 who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy

The CDC also says “American Indians and Alaskan Natives seem to be at higher risk of flu-related complications.”

Other people for whom getting the vaccine is especially important include:

- people who live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities
- people who live with or care for those at high risk for flu-related complications, including health care workers and household contacts of people at high risk for complications from flu, such as caregivers of children under the age of 5 and especially under the age of 6 months

People who should *not* get the flu vaccine

The following should *not* get vaccinated without first consulting their health care provider:

- people who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs, one that includes respiratory symptoms or breathing trouble
- people who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination
- people who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine
- children under 6 months of age

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- people who have a moderate-to-severe illness with a fever (who should wait to get vaccinated until after their symptoms lessen)

Contact your health care provider if you have questions or concerns about getting the flu vaccine. You can find additional flu and vaccine information at Flu.gov (*www.flu.gov*).

The program that provided this publication has many additional resources on taking care of yourself in cold and flu season.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Written with the help of Deborah Borchers, M.D.