



Flu Vaccinations

Influenza, often called the flu, is a highly contagious viral disease. Flu viruses infect the nose, throat and lungs. The flu is the sixth leading cause of death among American adults. People get the flu when they come into contact with a flu virus, most often by breathing in the virus or touching something that has the virus on it (doorknob, phone, etc.).

What is the flu vaccine?

Because viruses do not respond to antibiotics, each year a flu vaccine is created and distributed. The vaccine comes in two forms:

- The flu shot – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for anyone older than 6 months, including people who are healthy and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine – a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for “live attenuated influenza vaccine” or FluMists®). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people ages 2 to 49 who are not pregnant.

Flu vaccines start as early as September and extend well into winter and early spring. A flu vaccination is beneficial for anyone who has not yet been infected.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

Anyone can get the flu, but some people are more likely to have flu-related complications. Due to their susceptibility, the following groups are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated:

- Children 6 months up to 18 years old
- Women who are pregnant
- People 50 years of age and older
- People with certain chronic medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, HIV, COPD, etc.)
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for people in any of the above categories, including people who are:
 - Healthcare workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk from complications from the flu
 - Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

What are the side effects?

For most people, there are no side effects from the flu vaccine. Some people may experience soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site. A few people may experience a low-grade fever or muscle aches, which usually subside within 24 to 48 hours. Vaccines do not give people the flu; the flu viruses in the vaccine are dead and cannot cause harm.

Where can I get vaccinated?

Attend a local vaccination clinic in the community or at your workplace, or talk with your healthcare provider.