



Influenza (Flu)

What is influenza (flu)?

Influenza (flu) is a respiratory disease caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. It can be mild, but is sometimes severe and at times can lead to death. It is not the same as the “stomach flu.”

What are the symptoms of flu?

Flu symptoms include fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, and body aches. These symptoms come on quickly and can be severe keeping you in bed for several days.

Should I get a flu vaccination?

Yes. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get flu vaccine every year. Getting a flu shot (or nasal spray) helps protect you from getting the flu and prevents you from passing it to people who could get very sick.

Who is most at risk for getting very sick from flu?

- people age 65 and older
- young children, especially those under 2 years old
- pregnant women
- people with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease
- American Indian and Alaska Natives

Although these groups are at highest risk, anyone can become very sick with flu.

How is the flu different from a cold?

Colds are generally less serious than the flu. With a cold, you're more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose, while the flu causes body aches, fever, and extreme fatigue. A person with a cold can usually keep up with their normal activities, but someone with the flu can't. Colds usually do not result in serious health problems like pneumonia, bacterial infections, and hospitalization, but flu can.

Can I get the flu from the flu shot?

No. Some people get a slight fever or runny nose for a short time after being vaccinated, but this is a sign that your body is responding to the vaccine. It is not the flu. Also, because there are many viruses circulating in the fall, it is possible that a person could get sick with a different virus around the same time they receive the flu vaccine.

When should I get vaccinated?

For best protection, flu vaccine is usually given in early fall before flu season starts. But you can get it anytime during flu season which is typically October through April.

Do children need one or two doses of flu vaccine?

It depends on the child's age and whether they got flu vaccine in the past. If your child is 6 months through 8 years old, he or she may need two doses at least four weeks apart. Ask your doctor or clinic.

What type of flu vaccine should I get?

There are now several types of flu vaccine available. The type of vaccine you can get depends on things like your age, health conditions, if you're pregnant, and allergies. Your health care provider will know what type of vaccine you should get. The most important thing is to get vaccinated. Don't wait for a specific type of flu vaccine to be available.

- **Nasal spray vaccine** - This can be given to healthy, non-pregnant persons 2 to 50 years of age. This vaccine is preferred for children ages 2 through 8, if the child has no contraindications and the vaccine is available. If your provider does not have the nasal spray, you should get the flu shot.

- **Quadrivalent vaccine** - This vaccine protects against four strains (or types) of flu: two A strains and two B strains. It is available in the nasal spray or a shot. This vaccine's effectiveness will depend on whether two B strains of flu are circulating during the flu season. If your provider does not have quadrivalent vaccine, you should get the traditional flu shot.
- **High-dose vaccine** - This vaccine is approved for persons 65 and older and contains four times the amount of vaccine protein of the traditional vaccine. This vaccine produces a stronger immune response in people 65 and older, and early studies have shown that it may be more effective in this age group than other flu shots. If your provider does not have high-dose vaccine, you should get the traditional flu shot.
- **DNA technology (RIV) and cell-based flu vaccines** – These are the newest flu vaccines. They are not made using chicken eggs like traditional flu vaccines. RIV is preferred for persons who have severe egg allergies, but this vaccine and the cell-based flu vaccine may not be as widely available as traditional flu vaccines.

Can I be vaccinated if I have an egg allergy?

In most cases, a person with an egg allergy can be safely vaccinated. Persons who have only hives after eating eggs can get the flu shot. After vaccination, you will be asked to stay to be watched for 30 minutes. A person who has more severe reactions to eggs also has options to be protected from flu. The egg-free flu vaccine may be one option if you are between 18-49 years of age – talk to your health care provider.

What can I do to protect myself and others?

- Get vaccinated.
- Avoid being around others who are sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Clean your hands often with soap and water, or an alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer.
- Protect infants by not exposing them to large crowds or sick family members when flu is in your community.
- Do not share drinking cups and straws.
- Clean commonly touched surfaces often (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, and water faucets).

What if I think I have the flu?

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- If you are in a high-risk group, call your health care provider for advice.
- Go to the doctor or the emergency room if you are having these symptoms:
 - Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
 - Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
 - Sudden dizziness
 - Confusion
 - Severe or persistent vomiting
 - Flu-like symptoms that improve, but return with worse fever and cough

What about antiviral medicines?

Antiviral medicines can offer some protection if you have been exposed to flu, but these medications are only recommended for certain groups of people. If you have questions about antivirals, talk to your health care provider.