

Understanding the Flu and the Flu Vaccine

What is the flu?

The flu, also called influenza, is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Flu symptoms can range from mild to severe and include fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue, chills, nausea, runny or stuffy nose, and head and body aches. At its most severe, the flu can cause hospitalization and death.

How can I protect myself and my loved ones against the flu?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) recommend that **everyone ages six months and older get an updated flu shot** every year to protect against severe flu infection. While getting vaccinated earlier in the season is recommended, vaccination at any time during flu season, typically between October and May, can prevent severe flu-related illness.



Is the flu vaccine effective?

Yes. Vaccines activate the body's immune response against the flu virus, which can then protect people from severe respiratory illness. When administered as advised by healthcare professionals, flu vaccines can prevent flu infection, reduce the severity and duration of flu symptoms and illness, and save the lives of adults and children. **In fact, seasonal flu vaccine effectiveness studies show that flu vaccination, on average, reduces the risk of serious illness by 40% to 60%.**

Is the flu vaccine safe?

Yes. Flu vaccines are developed through a rigorous scientific process that has been refined over decades and have been thoroughly tested for safety and effectiveness.

Though different vaccine types use different production technologies, all flu vaccines meet the FDA's safety and efficacy requirements and can be used interchangeably by most people.

Some people report mild side effects after receiving the flu vaccine, such as headaches, muscle pain, fatigue, and swelling at the injection site. These side effects generally resolve within 24 to 48 hours. Though side effects might occur, flu vaccines cannot cause flu illness.

Getting a flu vaccine every year remains the single most effective way to prevent severe flu symptoms, hospitalization, and death. If you have additional questions about the flu vaccine, where to access it, and/or how to cover the cost, talk to a healthcare provider.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, August 14). *Benefits of the flu vaccine*. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu-vaccines-work/benefits/index.html>

Infectious Diseases Society of America. (n.d.). *Influenza*. <https://www.idsociety.org/ID-topics/infectious-disease/influenza/>

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