

Flu Vaccine FAQ's

Who should get the flu vaccine?

Just about everyone age 6 months and older who do not have contraindications. The CDC especially recommends the vaccine for those at increased risk for complications from the flu: children age 6-59 months, adults age 50 years and older, pregnant women, and those with chronic health conditions (lung, heart, kidney, liver, diabetes or cancer). It is especially important to get the vaccine if you, someone you live with, or someone you care for is at higher risk for flu-related complications. Having or surviving cancer increases the risk of severe complications from the flu. Please ask your health care provider if you have more questions about whether or not you should receive the vaccine.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

This depends on the age and health status of the person getting the vaccine and how well this year's vaccine matches the circulating strains of flu. Last year's vaccine was estimated overall to be 47% effective. Even though some people may still get a milder case of the flu even after receiving the vaccine, those who receive the flu vaccine are significantly less likely (57-74%) to need hospitalization for the flu. This is especially important for people with weaker immune systems.

When should I get the vaccine?

Ideally, before the end of October, if possible. Flu season usually peaks in January or February, but it can occur as late as May. Early immunization is the most effective, but it is not too late to get the vaccine in December, January, or beyond.

How long is my flu vaccine good for?

One flu season. Each season, the flu vaccine is formulated to work against the strains of flu that are expected to circulate that season. This is why you should get a new vaccine each year.

Does the flu vaccine work right away?

No. It takes about *two weeks* after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu virus. In the meantime, you are still at risk for getting the flu. It is better to get vaccinated early in the fall before the flu season.

Is the vaccine safe?

Seasonal flu vaccines have a very good safety track record. Although there are possible side-effects to vaccination, the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration closely monitor the safety of seasonal flu vaccines.

What are the side effects that could occur?

Common side effects from the flu shot include:

- Short term (1-2 days) soreness, redness, and/or swelling from the shot
- As with any shot or medical procedure, some people may have a risk of fainting
- Some people may experience symptoms of an immune system response to the vaccine, including headache, fever, nausea and muscle aches. However, since the flu vaccine contains an inactivated virus, it cannot cause the flu.

Extremely *rare* allergic reactions (*seek medical attention immediately*): breathing problems, hoarseness or breathing, hives, fast heartbeat, dizziness.

Why is a higher dose flu vaccine available for adults 65 and older?

Human immune defenses become weaker with age, which places older people at greater risk of severe illness from influenza. Also, aging decreases the body's ability to have a good immune response after getting influenza vaccine. A higher dose of antigen in the high dose vaccine has been demonstrated to stimulate a better immune response and better protection against the flu in those over age 65. A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine indicated that the high-dose vaccine was **24.2% more effective in preventing flu in adults 65 years of age and older relative to a standard-dose vaccine**. The confidence interval for this result was 9.7% to 36.5%.

Is Fluzone High-Dose safe?

The safety profile of Fluzone High-Dose vaccine is similar to that of regular flu vaccines, although some adverse events (which are also reported after regular flu vaccines) were reported more frequently after vaccination with Fluzone High-Dose. The most common adverse events experienced during clinical studies were mild and temporary, and included pain, redness at the injection site, headache, muscle aches, and malaise. Most people had minimal or no adverse events after receiving the Fluzone High-Dose vaccine. The CDC and its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices have not expressed a preference for any flu vaccine indicated for people 65 and older. CDC recommends flu vaccination as the first and most important step in protecting against the flu.

Where can I find more information?

Ask your health care provider, or check out the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>

More info about the high dose flu vaccine at:

https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/qa_fluzone.htm

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