

# Flu (Influenza) and the Vaccine to Prevent It

Last updated October 2017

**The best way to protect against flu is by getting a flu vaccine. Doctors recommend that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine every year by the end of October, if possible.**

## Why should my child get a flu vaccine?

A flu vaccine:

- Helps protect your child from flu illness, including serious illness that can result in hospitalization and even death.
- Helps prevent your child from spreading flu to others, including babies younger than 6 months who are too young to get a flu vaccine.
- Helps keep your child from missing school or child care (and keeps you from missing work to care for your child).

## Are flu vaccines safe?

Yes. Flu vaccines have a good safety record. Flu vaccines have been used in the United States for more than 50 years. During that time, hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received seasonal flu vaccines. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects, but, most people who get a flu vaccine have no side effects or mild side effects that go away on their own within a few days.

## What are the side effects?

Flu vaccination can cause mild side effects. For example, people vaccinated with a flu shot may feel achy and their arm might be sore where the shot was given. These side effects are NOT the flu. If experienced at all, these effects are usually mild and go away on their own within a few days.

## Only Injectable Flu Shots This Season:

- Flu shots are usually given in the arm. Children 6 months and older should get an injectable flu shot every year. The nasal spray flu vaccine (LAIV) is not recommended for the 2017-2018 season.

## What is the flu?

Flu—short for influenza—is an illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu viruses infect the nose, upper airways, throat, and lungs. Flu spreads easily and can cause serious illness, especially for young children, older people, pregnant women, and people with certain long-term medical conditions like asthma and diabetes.

## What are the symptoms of the flu?

Flu symptoms can include the following:

- Fever (not everyone with the flu has a fever) or feeling feverish/chills
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Headache
- Muscle or body aches
- Tiredness
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea (this is more common in children than adults)

Most people who get influenza recover in a few days to less than two weeks. Some people develop complications (such as pneumonia) that can result in hospitalization and even death.



Doctors recommend that your child get a flu vaccine every year starting when he is 6 months old. Some children 6 months through 8 years of age may need 2 doses for best protection.

## Is it serious?

Millions of children get sick with flu each year and thousands are hospitalized. CDC estimates that since 2010, flu-related hospitalizations in children younger than 5 years old have ranged from 6,000 to 26,000 in the United States each year. Children with long-term medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and disorders of the brain or nervous system, and children younger than 5 years old (and children especially younger than 2 years old) are more likely to end up in the hospital from flu.

Flu seasons vary in how serious they are from one season to another. Since 2004, the total number of reported flu-associated deaths in children has ranged from 37 to 171 per season. This range doesn't include the 2009 pandemic, when states reported 358 flu-associated deaths in children to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some of the more serious complications from flu include:

- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids)
- Worsening of long-term medical conditions, like asthma and diabetes

## How does flu spread?

Flu spreads when people who have flu talk, cough, or sneeze, and droplets that have the virus in them land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. You may also get flu by touching an object with flu virus on it—like a doorknob or used tissue—and then touching your own eyes, nose, or mouth. People can spread flu to others from one day before they have symptoms to 5-7 days after they get sick. This can be longer in children and people who are very sick.

People who have the flu should stay home and away from others (except to go to the doctor) until 24 hours after their fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

## Can my child get flu from a flu vaccine?

No, flu vaccines do not cause flu. Flu vaccine protects your child from flu illness. However, flu shots can sometimes cause mild side effects that may be mistaken for flu. Keep in mind that it will take about 2 weeks after getting his vaccine for your child to build protection against flu.

## Why does my child need a flu vaccine every year?

Flu viruses are constantly changing, so new vaccines are made each year to protect against the flu viruses that are likely to cause the most illness. Also, protection provided by flu vaccination wears off over time. Your child's flu vaccine will protect against flu all season, but vaccination will be needed again for the next flu season.

## Where can I learn more about flu vaccine and my child?

To learn more about flu vaccines, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO, or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents). For more in-depth information about flu, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).

## How can I protect my child against the flu?

- Get your flu vaccine while you are pregnant. This can help protect your baby for the first few months after birth, before they can get their own flu vaccine.
- Get your vaccine every year, and ask your baby's caregivers to get vaccinated as well.
- Make sure your child gets their dose(s) of flu vaccine soon after it's available each season.
- Children younger than 9 years old who are getting vaccinated for the first time need two doses of flu vaccine, spaced at least 28 days apart. Children who only get one dose but need two doses can have reduced or no protection from a single dose of flu vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.