

Common Questions About the Flu Vaccine

Table of Contents

- Overview
- Credits

Overview

The flu (influenza) vaccine saves lives. But sometimes people choose not to get the vaccine because of incorrect information they've heard about the vaccine or the flu.

With conflicting messages out there, it can be hard to know what's true and what to do. The answers to these common questions may help you feel good about deciding to get protected from the flu. And maybe you can use this information to encourage others to get protected too.

Question: Why do I need the vaccine? Getting the flu isn't a big deal, is it?

Answer: At best, the flu is no fun. Even a mild case can cause you to feel bad and miss work or school for a week or more. At worst, flu can become a very serious illness. It's especially risky for some people, including older adults, young children, and people with chronic health conditions like asthma or diabetes. Being pregnant also increases the risk of severe illness. But even otherwise healthy children and adults can get very sick or even die. It's much safer to get the vaccine than to get the flu.

Question: Do I really need to get a flu shot every year? Why isn't one shot enough?

Answer: The protection provided by the flu vaccine fades over time. Plus, flu viruses are always changing. Experts track these changes and update the vaccine every year. With very few exceptions, everyone over the age of 6 months needs to get the flu vaccine each fall. This gives the best protection. If you're pregnant, getting the flu shot also helps to protect your baby until they're old enough to get the vaccine.

Question: What's the point of getting the vaccine if I might still get the flu?

Answer: The flu vaccine prevents many people from getting the flu, but it isn't perfect. It takes about 2 weeks for the shot to be effective, so it's possible to catch the flu before you're fully protected. (And the flu vaccine doesn't prevent colds, "stomach flu," or other viral infections, which may sometimes be mistaken for the flu.) Still, if you do get the flu after getting vaccinated, you're much less likely to get very sick, end up in the hospital, or die from the flu.

Most people who die from the flu didn't get a flu shot. And many of those who die—especially children—were healthy before they got the flu.

Question: Can the flu vaccine make me sick?

Answer: You can't get the flu from the flu vaccine. But any vaccine can make you feel a little ill. For example, you might feel achy or have a slight fever for a few days. This is a sign that your immune system is learning how to fight off the actual flu virus.

Question: It's a hassle and I don't like shots, so I may skip the flu vaccine. Isn't this just a personal choice?

Answer: Nobody loves getting shots. And in fact, some people can get the flu vaccine as a nasal spray instead of a shot. If you're interested, ask your doctor or pharmacist about the nasal flu vaccine.

Whether to get the vaccine or not *is* a choice that only you can make. But it's about more than just you. Chances are, you're part of a family or community. And this group may include people for whom the flu could be serious or deadly. This might be a new grandchild, a beloved aunt, or a good friend who has a chronic disease. If you get the flu, you could spread it to others. By choosing to get the vaccine, you're helping to protect those you care about as well as yourself.

Credits

Current as of: June 13, 2023

Author: Healthwise Staff

Clinical Review Board: All Healthwise education is reviewed by a team that includes physicians, nurses, advanced practitioners, registered dietitians, and other healthcare professionals.

Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.



This information does not replace the advice of a doctor. Healthwise, Incorporated, disclaims any warranty or liability for your use of this information.

© 1995-2023 Healthwise, Incorporated. Healthwise, Healthwise for every health decision, and the Healthwise logo are trademarks of Healthwise, Incorporated.