



FACT SHEET

Key Facts About Flu Vaccine

Preventing the flu: The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each fall.

There are two types of vaccines:

- **The "flu shot"** – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions.
- **The nasal-spray flu vaccine** – a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called **LAIV** for "Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine"). LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

Each vaccine contains three influenza viruses – one A (H3N2) virus, one A (H1N1) virus, and one B virus. The viruses in the vaccine change each year based on international surveillance and scientists' predictions about which types and strains of viruses will circulate in a given year.

About 2 weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against influenza virus infection develop in the body.

When to Get Vaccinated

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May.

Who Should Get Vaccinated

Anyone who wants to reduce their risk for the flu can get vaccinated. However, certain people should get vaccinated each year either because they are at high risk of having serious flu complications, or because they are in close contact with someone who is at high risk for serious complications and they could make them sick.

For more information, see "[Who Should Get an Influenza \(Flu\) Vaccine](#)," or "[What Everyone Should Know about Flu and the Flu Vaccine](#)."

Vaccine Effectiveness

The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on the age and health status of the person getting the vaccine, and the similarity or "match" between the virus strains in the vaccine and those in circulation. Testing has shown that both the flu shot and the nasal-spray vaccine are effective at preventing the flu.

Vaccine Side Effects (What to Expect)

Different side effects can be associated with the flu shot and LAIV.

Key Facts about the Flu Vaccine

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The flu shot: The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that could occur are:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever (low grade)
- Aches

If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot and usually last 1 to 2 days. Almost all people who receive influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it. However, on rare occasions, flu vaccination can cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions.

LAIV: The viruses in the nasal-spray vaccine are weakened and will not cause severe symptoms often associated with influenza illness. (In clinical studies, transmission of vaccine viruses to close contacts has occurred only rarely.)

In children, side effects can include:

- runny nose
- headache
- vomiting
- muscle aches
- fever

In adults, side effects can include:

- runny nose
- headache
- sore throat
- cough

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu, or call the National Immunization Hotline at (800) 232-2522 (English), (800) 232-0233 (español), or (800) 243-7889 (TTY).

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