

FLU FAQs 2016-2017

What is influenza (flu)?

The flu stems from influenza viruses infecting the nose, throat, and lungs. An extremely contagious infection of the respiratory system, the flu can cause severe illness, including hospitalization and death.

What are the signs and symptoms?

A person infected with the flu can display signs and symptoms such as: fever (feverish/chills), sore throat, cough, runny / stuffy nose, headaches, muscle / body aches, fatigue, and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea.

How does the flu spread?

The flu can spread through droplets, such as when infected people talk, cough, or sneeze, or by a person touching an object or surface with flu virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes.

Is the flu really that bad?

Though many people infected with the flu will recover in less than 2 weeks, some people can develop complications, including:

- Dehydration
- Ear infections
- Inflammation of the heart, muscle tissue, or brain, and organ failure (e.g. respiratory and kidney)
- Pneumonia
- Sinus infections
- Worsening of chronic conditions (asthma, congestive heart failure, or diabetes)
- Increased disease severity, including death

When am I contagious?

Infected persons can begin spreading the virus 1 day prior to developing symptoms, and potentially 5-7 days after becoming ill. Younger people, especially those with weakened immune systems, could potentially infect others during longer periods. The flu season can vary, but generally it starts as early as October and can last through May.

What is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is a combination of three or four inactivated flu viruses. Once the vaccine is in the body, it takes two weeks to develop antibodies and protect from illness against those viruses. The World Health Organization uses projection models to predict the flu viruses that will likely be circulating in the upcoming season. It is important to be vaccinated in the fall to allow antibodies to develop.

Is the flu vaccine effective?

The flu vaccine is the most effective way to prevent the flu illness. **Recent studies from the CDC show that the flu vaccine is 52-72% effective at reducing the risk of the flu illness.** The decision to vaccinate therefore cuts down the chances of developing the flu illness by more than half.

Does the flu vaccine make me sick?

No! The viruses in the flu vaccine are inactivated and cannot cause the flu illness. People may still become sick even after receiving the flu vaccine if they were exposed before receiving the vaccine or before developing antibodies. If the viruses change and are different from what is in the vaccine, health organizations will work to establish new vaccines, as in the 2009 H1N1 outbreak.

Why do we need the flu vaccine?

In 1918, the Spanish flu became a pandemic; 20-40% of the world's population became sick, and about 50 million people died as a result. When a new flu virus appeared in 1957, a vaccine was developed to prevent the flu in the U.S. The CDC now recommends everyone 6 months and older without a severe life-threatening allergy to the flu vaccine or ingredients, receive the flu vaccine seasonally. With each passing season, the flu viruses change to survive, and the body's immune response declines.

Can my child with asthma get the vaccine?

Yes. Children with conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, cancer, and children younger than 5 years, are especially important to vaccinate as they are considered "high-risk"—which means they are more likely to have health complications as a result of the flu.

Get the flu vaccine here or there,
get the flu vaccine anywhere!

While we try to make our flu vaccine appointments as convenient as possible for our patients and their families, we understand that not all schedules may be accommodated. If your child receives the flu vaccine at another location—such as a pharmacy, school, or specialist's office—please call and leave our nurses a message with the date vaccinated and location of the clinic so that we can accurately maintain your child's vaccination record.

