Frequently Asked Questions About Flu Immunization

What is influenza?
While many people refer to even mild colds as “the flu”, most mild colds are not caused by influenza viruses. Influenza is a serious disease that can lead to severe illness, sometimes requiring hospitalization. Each year in the United States, 35,000-40,000 people die of influenza. While most people who die of influenza have risk factors for severe disease (see below), even healthy people without risk factors for severe influenza can get very sick from the flu. Furthermore, because the flu is very infectious, healthy people can spread flu to susceptible people.

When is “flu season”?
Influenza is a seasonal disease that occurs most commonly during mid-winter. During flu season, flu viruses circulate among susceptible people in the population. An annual seasonal flu vaccine (either the flu shot or the nasal-spray flu vaccine) is the best way to reduce the chances that you will get seasonal flu. Flu immunization also lessens the chance that you will spread flu to your family members, friends, colleagues, and other contacts. To protect people from acquiring influenza, flu vaccines are best received during the autumn, before flu season.

What are the types of influenza vaccines?
- The "flu shot" — an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given by injection, usually in the arm. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy persons and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine “nasal mist” — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu (sometimes called LAIV for "live attenuated influenza vaccine" or FluMist®). LAIV (FluMist®) is approved for use in healthy* people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant. This vaccine, popular with children and teens, avoids the use of needles.

Can the flu vaccine give you the flu?
No. The injectable flu vaccine contains no live virus, so it is incapable of causing influenza. The live attenuated nasal mist vaccine causes transient cold symptoms in 3% of patients. The symptoms are mild and typically last for one day.

Who should be immunized?
The Centers for Disease Control now recommends routine influenza vaccination for all people aged 6 months and older. This is a CDC-recommended expansion of the previous recommendations for annual vaccination of all adults aged 19 - 49 years.
**Who is at highest risk for severe influenza?**

- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- Children younger than 5 years (and especially children younger than 2 years old)
- Children, teens and adults with lung disease, including asthma, chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, and cystic fibrosis
- Children, teens and adults with diabetes
- Children, teens and adults with heart disease
- Children teens and adults with neuromuscular disorders
- All people with compromised immune systems, including persons with cancer, autoimmune diseases, or HIV/AIDS. Persons receiving cancer chemotherapy or who take chronic steroids or other immune suppressing medications are also at increased risk for severe influenza

**Should I receive flu vaccine to protect others?**

*Yes!*

*Flu immunization is recommended for:*

- Household contacts of persons at high risk for severe influenza (see above)
- Childcare providers
- Teachers
- All healthcare providers
- Emergency service workers

**What influenza strains are covered by the 2010 influenza vaccine?**

- A/California/7/2009 (H1N1) (2009 pandemic influenza A (H1N1) virus)
- A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2)
- B/Brisbane/60/2008

**Who Should Not Be Vaccinated?**

There are some people who should not get a flu vaccine without first consulting their healthcare provider. These include:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination.
- People who, in the past, developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine.
- Children less than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for this age group)
- People who have a moderate-to-severe illness with a fever (they should wait until they recover to get vaccinated). Persons with mild febrile illnesses may be vaccinated.
What are the side effects of the flu vaccine?
Influenza vaccines are effective and are very safe. While many patients experience some transient mild tenderness at the infection site, most people experience no significant discomfort.

### Vaccine: Flu Shot or Nasal Spray?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age and Conditions</th>
<th>One dose of Seasonal Vaccine</th>
<th>Two doses of Seasonal Vaccine</th>
<th>OK to Get Nasal Spray?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 6 months</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months – 9 years</td>
<td>One dose of seasonal flu vaccine if the child has had seasonal flu vaccination in the past.</td>
<td>Two doses of seasonal flu vaccine are needed if this is the first time the child is receiving flu vaccination.</td>
<td>No for children younger than two years. Yes, for children older than two years, unless the child has certain conditions. Check below for conditions information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 49 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Can receive nasal spray if healthy and no underlying health conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 years and older</td>
<td>Flu Shot Only</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant women</td>
<td>Flu Shot Only</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
<td>Flu Shot Only</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>Flu Shot Only</td>
<td>Two doses of only Flu Shot if 6 months – 9 years (if first time flu vaccination)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 years and younger, with a history of recurrent wheezing</td>
<td>Flu Shot Only</td>
<td>Two doses of only Flu Shot if 6 months – 5 years (if first time flu vaccination)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children or adolescents receiving aspirin therapy</td>
<td>Flu Shot Only</td>
<td>Two doses of only Flu Shot if 6 months – 9 years (if first time flu vaccination)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who have had Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting a flu vaccine</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs or who are allergic to any of the nasal spray vaccine components.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* When a critical portion of a community is immunized against a contagious disease, most members of the community are protected against that disease because there is little opportunity for an outbreak. Even those who are not eligible for certain vaccines get some protection because the spread of contagious disease is contained. This is known as "community immunity."