

the Flu

About the Flu:

Influenza (commonly called “the flu”) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year. Every year in the United States, between 5 to 20 percent of the population gets the flu; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications; and about 36,000 people die from flu.

Symptoms of Flu:

The flu is different from a cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms: fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, are much more common among children than adults.



Who is at Greatest Risk? Who Should Get Vaccinated?

In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu should get vaccinated. Vaccination is safe and is the most effective way to fight the flu.

Certain people are strongly recommended to get vaccinated each year. These are people at high risk of having severe flu complications and people who live with or care for those at high risk of severe flu complications. People who should get vaccinated each year are:

- Children aged 6 months through 18 years
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions, including asthma and diabetes.
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including, household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

Children and Flu Vaccine:

The CDC recommends that all children and teens from the ages of 6 months through 18 years of age get a flu vaccine every fall or winter. Children 6 months up to 9 years of age getting a flu vaccine **for the first time** will need two doses of vaccine the first year they

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are vaccinated, with the first dose ideally being given in September or as soon as vaccine becomes available. The second dose should be given 28 or more days after the first dose.

- Flu shots can be given to children 6 months and older
- A nasal-spray vaccine can be given to healthy children 2 years and older (children under 5 years old who have had wheezing in the past year or any child with chronic health problems should get the flu shot).

You can protect your child by getting a flu vaccine for yourself too. Also encourage your child's close contacts to get a flu vaccine. This is very important if your child is younger than 5 or has a chronic health problem like asthma (breathing disease) or diabetes (high blood sugar levels).

When is the Best Time to Immunize Against the Flu?

Yearly flu vaccination should begin in September or as soon as vaccine is available and continue through the influenza season, (which can extend into December, January, and beyond). The timing and duration of influenza seasons vary. While influenza outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the time influenza activity peaks in January or later.

Vaccine Reactions

The majority of children who receive the vaccine (about 80 percent) will have no side effects. Of those children who have a side effect, most will have only a mild local reaction such as soreness or redness where the shot was given, fever (low grade), or muscle aches. The flu vaccine cannot give a person the flu.

In very rare cases (far less than 1 out of 10,000), vaccinated children can have a serious allergic reaction. Children who have an allergy to eggs (which are used in making the vaccine) or any component of the flu vaccine are at greater risk for a serious allergic reaction.

Your child's chance of being harmed by the flu is far greater than the chance of being harmed by the vaccine. Immunizations are one of the most important ways parents can protect their children against serious diseases.

What Are Some Good Health Habits to Follow?

The following steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illness like flu:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your upper sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- Clean your hands regularly
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth

Who Can I Talk to About Getting Vaccinated Against the Flu?

Talk to your physician or your child's pediatrician about getting vaccinated. Parents can also talk to someone in their local health department's immunization program about getting the vaccine as well. Remember, the best time to immunize against the flu is September through November. However, it is not too late to get vaccinated in December or later.

Other Resources

- www.immunize.nc.gov
Immunization Branch,
N.C. Department of Health
and Human Services
- www.cdc.gov/flu
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Flu Home Page
- www.immunizationinfo.org
National Network for Immunization
Information

