

**Q: What are the two types of flu vaccines?**

**A:** Live, attenuated flu vaccine (LAIV) contains live but weakened flu virus. It is sprayed into the nostrils rather than injected.

Inactivated flu vaccine, sometimes called the “flu shot,” is given by injection.

**Q: Can flu vaccine give me the flu?**

**A:** No. Flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. The flu virus contained in flu vaccine is killed or weakened, which means they cannot cause infection.

**Q: How serious is the flu?**

**A:** The flu is a very serious disease that can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Every year in the United States, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized because of the flu and about 36,000 people die from flu. Very young children (less than 2 years of age) are hospitalized with the flu as much as older persons (65 years of age and older). Children aged 2 to 5 years are at increased risk for influenza-associated clinic and emergency room visits.

**Q: What are the side effects from the vaccine?**

**A:** Almost all people who get flu vaccine have no serious problems from it. If problems do occur, they begin soon after the vaccine was given and usually last one to two days. Some people should not be given flu vaccine. They include:

- Infants less than 6 months of age;
- People with an allergy to eggs, egg products, or any component of the vaccine;
- Anyone with a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome; or
- Anyone sick with a fever should talk with a doctor or a nurse about when to get the vaccine.

**Q: Isn't the vaccine just for older people?**

**A:** Flu vaccine is recommended for any person older than 6 months old. Especially those who are at increased risk for illness from the flu. Anyone with an ongoing medical condition such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes should be vaccinated.

People in close contact with persons at high risk, including caregivers, should be vaccinated to decrease their risk for spreading the flu. Flu vaccine can also be given to any person 6 months of age or older who wishes to reduce their chance of becoming sick with the flu.

**Q: What is the difference between a cold and the flu?**

**A:** The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu. People with colds are more likely to have a runny or stuffy nose. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations.

**Q: Why do I need to get vaccinated every year?**

**A:** Flu viruses change from year to year, which means two things. First, you can get the flu more than once during your lifetime. The immunity (natural protection that develops against a disease after a person has had that disease) that is built up from having the flu caused by one virus strain doesn't always provide protection when a new strain is circulating. Second, a vaccine made against flu viruses circulating last year may not protect against the newer viruses. That is why the flu vaccine is updated to include current viruses every year.



**Kids Get Flu,  
Too!  
Protect Yours!**



Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene

Center For Immunization



Governor, Martin O'Malley

Lieutenant Governor, Anthony G. Brown

Secretary, Joshua M. Sharfstein

# What every parent should know about influenza..

## WHAT is influenza?

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, on average:

- 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- about 36,000 people die from flu.

Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), are at high risk for serious flu complications.

## HOW is it spread?

Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with the flu. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 days **after** becoming sick. **That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**

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

## WHO should get a flu vaccination?

In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu should get vaccinated. However, certain people should get vaccinated each year either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for high-risk persons.

People who should get vaccinated each year are:

People at high risk for complications from the flu, including:

- Children aged 6 months through 18 years;
- Pregnant women;
- People 50 years of age and older;
- People of any age with certain ongoing medical conditions; and
- People who live in nursing homes and other long term care facilities.

People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:

- Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu (see above);
- Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated); and
- Health care workers.

Anyone who wants to decrease their risk of getting the flu.

## WHY should children be vaccinated?

Children under 5 years of age are at increased risk for flu-related hospitalizations. In fact, the flu causes more hospitalizations among young children than any other vaccine-preventable disease. Additionally, influenza/pneumonia is the 6th leading cause of death among young children (ages 1-4 years) in the United States.



## WHAT can I do to protect my child against influenza?

- Make an appointment to have your child vaccinated.
- Encourage family and friends to get vaccinated.
- Get vaccinated yourself.
- Practice good hygiene—washing your hands often and cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.