

What is the flu?

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a very contagious disease that spreads through droplets made when people with the flu cough, sneeze, or talk and others breathe in these droplets or touch surfaces where the droplets landed.

What are the symptoms and side effects of the flu?

Flu symptoms include fever/chills, sore throat, muscle aches, fatigue, cough, headache, and runny or stuffy nose. People who catch the flu may pass it to others from one day before symptoms begin to 5 - 7 days after getting sick.

Healthy adults and children can easily get sick from the flu. Every year, the flu infects up to 20% of Americans and hospitalizes many. Up to 50,000 Americans will die from the flu each year.

How do I keep from getting the flu?

CDC recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get a flu shot. This is the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease.

Young children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease are at increased risk of serious flu-related complications, so getting the flu vaccine is especially important.

Why do I have to have a flu vaccine every year?

The viruses that are most likely to affect people each flu season change from year to year.

What types of flu vaccines are available?

There are two types of flu vaccines:

■ The flu shot contains an inactivated vaccine. The vaccine contains a killed virus, meaning that it cannot give you the flu. It is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people, people with chronic medical conditions, as well as pregnant women.

■ The nasal-spray flu vaccine is a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses given as a nasal spray (sometimes called LAIV for "Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine"). The viruses in the nasal spray vaccine do not cause the flu, but may cause some nasal congestion. LAIV is indicated for healthy non-pregnant persons, 2 through 49 years of age.

In addition to getting the vaccine what can I do to keep from getting the flu?

In addition to getting the vaccine, do the following:

- Cover your cough
- Wash your hands often
- Try not to touch your eyes, mouth, and nose too frequently
- Stay away from those who are sick
- Stay home if you are sick
- If you get sick, take anti-viral medication as prescribed by your healthcare provider.

How safe is the vaccine?

The flu vaccine is both safe and effective. The flu vaccine does not cause the flu. However, there are certain people who should talk to their doctor before getting the flu vaccine.

This includes those individuals who:

- Have had severe reactions to a flu shot in the past
- Have had Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)
- Are younger than 6 months of age
- Are sick with a fever

Is the flu vaccine effective?

Vaccine effectiveness is how well the flu vaccines work to prevent influenza illness. It can vary from year to year and among age and risk groups. Flu vaccination can reduce the risk of serious flu outcomes like hospitalization and death.

When should I get the vaccine?

Flu vaccination should begin soon after the vaccine becomes available, ideally by October. However, as long as flu viruses are circulating, **vaccination should continue to be offered throughout the flu season.**

Where can I get the flu vaccine?

The best place to get the flu vaccine is at your health-care provider's office or clinic. You can also get it at your local pharmacy or at other community vaccinators. To find the closest place to get a flu vaccine, visit TexasFlu.org and click on the "Flu Vaccine Finder" button.

For more information, visit TexasFlu.org or call (800) 252-9152.

