

health  chats

# IMPORTANCE OF VACCINES



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# Why the Flu Vaccine Matters

Recognize symptoms • Protect yourself and others • Know when to seek care

Flu Season Education | 2026–2027

# What Is Influenza (Flu)?

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses.

It can range from mild illness to severe disease, hospitalization, and—in some cases—death.

Flu often begins suddenly rather than gradually like a typical cold.

Most people recover within several days to less than two weeks, but cough and fatigue can last longer.

## **Remember**

Not everyone with flu has a fever.

# Common Flu Symptoms

Symptoms can vary from person to person.

## **Fever / chills**

Fever or feeling feverish; chills are common.

## **Cough**

Often prominent and may be severe.

## **Sore throat**

May occur with other respiratory symptoms.

## **Body aches**

Muscle or body aches can be significant.

## **Headache**

A common flu symptom.

## **Fatigue**

Tiredness or weakness may be substantial.

# If You Are Feeling Ill: Protect Yourself & Others

Stay home and avoid close contact with others except when seeking medical care.

Rest, drink fluids, and monitor how your symptoms are changing.

Cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands frequently, and consider masking around others.

Do not go to work or school simply because you can “push through it.” Staying home helps reduce spread.

Return to normal activities when symptoms are improving overall and you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medicine.

# When Should You Get Checked?

## Call your provider early

Especially if you are at higher risk for complications or your illness is significant. Antiviral treatment works best when started within 1–2 days.

## Consider testing

Flu can resemble other respiratory infections. A healthcare professional can decide whether testing or treatment is appropriate.

## Seek urgent care

If symptoms are severe, worsening, or you are concerned about your condition.

Higher-risk groups include young children, adults 65+, pregnant people, and people with certain chronic medical conditions.

Antiviral treatment may still help later in illness for people who are very sick, hospitalized, or at higher risk.

# Know the Emergency Warning Signs

## Adults

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent chest or abdominal pain/pressure
- Persistent dizziness, confusion, or inability to wake
- Seizures
- Not urinating / signs of dehydration
- Severe weakness, muscle pain, or unsteadiness
- Fever or cough that improves and then returns or worsens

## Children

- Fast or difficult breathing
- Bluish lips or face
- Ribs pulling in with each breath
- Chest pain or severe muscle pain
- Dehydration or no urine for 8 hours
- Not alert or interacting when awake
- Seizures
- Fever/cough that improves and then returns or worsens

# Why Is the Flu Vaccine Important?

CDC recommends annual flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older, with rare exceptions.

Vaccination lowers the risk of getting flu and can reduce the severity of illness if you do become sick.

Vaccination can reduce flu-related medical visits, hospitalizations, and deaths.

It also helps protect people around you—especially those more vulnerable to serious flu complications.

Protection develops over about two weeks after vaccination.

## Timing

September and October are generally good times to vaccinate; ideally by the end of October.

# Why Does the Flu Vaccine Change Every Year?

## 1. Flu viruses change

Influenza viruses are constantly changing. This is called antigenic drift. The viruses circulating this season may differ from those circulating last season.

## 2. Protection decreases over time

The immune protection produced by vaccination declines over time, so an annual vaccine helps provide more current protection.

Experts review surveillance data and update the vaccine composition to target viruses expected to be most common in the upcoming season.

Because vaccine decisions must be made months before flu season, the match with circulating viruses is not guaranteed to be perfect.

# What Can I Expect After the Flu Vaccine?

## Common, usually mild effects

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Headache
- Low-grade fever
- Muscle aches
- Fatigue
- Occasionally, fainting can occur after an injection

## Important to know

- A flu shot cannot give you flu.
- Most side effects are mild and go away on their own within a few days.
- Severe allergic reactions are rare.
- Seek emergency help for hives, swelling of the face/throat, or difficulty breathing.

# Common Questions About the Flu Vaccine

**Can the flu shot give me the flu?**

No. Flu shots use inactivated virus or viral proteins and cannot cause flu illness.

**Can I still get the flu after vaccination?**

Yes. No vaccine provides 100% protection. Vaccination can still reduce the risk and severity of illness.

**Why do I need it every year?**

Virus strains change, and protection from vaccination declines over time.

**When should I get vaccinated?**

September or October is generally a good time; vaccination later can still be beneficial.

**Is it safe?**

Flu vaccines have a strong safety record and are continuously monitored.

# More Questions People Commonly Ask

## Can I get vaccinated if I have an egg allergy?

Yes. CDC states people with egg allergy may receive any age-appropriate flu vaccine.

## Can I get other vaccines at the same visit?

Many vaccines can be given during the same visit, although individual circumstances should be reviewed with a healthcare professional.

## Do I need antibiotics for the flu?

No. Antibiotics treat bacterial infections, not influenza viruses. A provider can determine whether another infection is present.

## What if I missed the fall vaccination window?

It is generally still worthwhile to get vaccinated later in the season while flu viruses are circulating.

## Bottom line

Prevent when you can. Stay home when you are sick. Seek care early when you are at higher risk or symptoms are severe. Get vaccinated every flu season.

# Sources & Additional Information

CDC — Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine (Sept. 1, 2026)

CDC — Seasonal Flu Vaccine Basics (Sept. 1, 2026)

CDC — Who Needs a Flu Vaccine (2025 guidance; current 2026 page)

CDC — Signs and Symptoms of Flu

CDC — Flu: What To Do If You Get Sick

CDC — Treating Flu with Antiviral Drugs (June 26, 2026)

CDC — Influenza (Flu) Vaccine Safety

For patient-specific questions, vaccine eligibility, or treatment decisions, consult a qualified healthcare professional.

# QUESTIONS?

