

# Questions and Answers about Influenza and the Injectable Influenza Vaccine (the “flu shot”)

## What is Influenza (the flu)?

Influenza (flu) is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and lungs. It can make you sick for a week or longer with coughing, fever, aching, and more. It can lead to pneumonia and make already existing health problems such as diabetes, asthma, and heart disease worse.

## Why should I get a flu shot?

Each year in the U.S. about 36,000 people die from flu-related causes. Getting a flu shot is the **BEST** way to protect yourself from the flu.

## Who should get a flu shot?

- Everyone who is 6 months or older can benefit from the protection of a flu shot.
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that the following people be among the first to get vaccinated each year because they are at high risk of serious flu complications:
  - People who are 50 years or older
  - People of any age who have ever had a heart attack, have heart disease, have lung disease such as asthma, emphysema or chronic bronchitis; have diabetes, HIV, a blood disorder, kidney disease, or a weakened immune system
  - Children age 6 months and older until their 5th birthday
  - Pregnant women
  - People who live in nursing homes or assisted living facilities
  - People who have health problems that make it difficult to breathe or swallow
- CDC also recommends that people who care for or live with anyone listed above get a flu vaccine. This includes healthcare workers. Getting a flu vaccine will help stop you from bringing the virus home or to work and infecting others.

## How does the flu shot work?

The flu shot helps your body fight the viruses that cause the flu. It does this by teaching your

immune system to recognize flu viruses, so that it is “primed” or ready, to fight the disease if you are exposed to it.

## How well does the flu shot work?

Most of the time, the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70% to 90% in healthy people younger than age 65 when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. The vaccine may be less effective in older people or people with weakened immune systems. However, these people still benefit from getting the vaccine because it helps prevent severe illness, hospitalization and death from the flu.

## What are the side effects of the flu shot?

The most common side effects are soreness or redness where the shot was given. These symptoms go away in a few days. Other side effects such as fever or aches are extremely rare. In clinical trials, there was no difference in side effects between people who got the vaccine and people who got a placebo (“sugar pill”). The risk of severe allergic reaction is less than 1 in 4 million.

## Can the flu shot give me the flu?

No. The ingredients in the vaccine cannot cause the flu. The flu viruses in the vaccine are killed.

## When should I get a flu shot?

October and November are the best months to get vaccinated, but December is not too late in most years.

## Can this shot help protect me against colds and other respiratory diseases?

No. This vaccine protects only against the flu viruses contained in the vaccine.

## What is the nasal spray flu vaccine?

The nasal spray vaccine is sprayed into a person’s nose, instead of being given as a shot. It is approved for use in healthy people 5 through 49 years old who are not pregnant. It is a safe and effective vaccine.



For more information, ask your healthcare provider  
or call **800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)**  
Website [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)