



2020 American Medical Association Influenza Information

Getting the flu shot is more important than ever

During the pandemic, some people have not necessarily been getting their preventive medical services that we all should continue getting. We really want to highlight the importance of continuing to get preventive services in general, and the flu vaccine is a great example of that.

Every year, influenza causes hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and tens of thousands of deaths in the United States. We're very concerned about it compounding the hospital capacity problems that we may see if we get more surges in the numbers of patients with COVID.

Additionally, it is possible to get influenza and COVID at the same time, and then you really have that double whammy in terms of two significant respiratory illnesses. The vaccine is really to get protection against that scenario.

The vaccine doesn't give you the flu

While the flu shot is made of pieces of the virus, the nasal spray is a whole virus, but it's an inactivated form of the virus, so neither kind can actually give you the flu. It's not uncommon for people to have a low-grade fever or feel a little run down for a couple of days after they get their vaccine. That's just their immune system responding to the vaccine and doing exactly what we want it to do.

Patients will sometimes coincidentally come down with the flu shortly after receiving the vaccination, but that's just a quirk of timing.

It takes the vaccine a couple of weeks to generate a full immune response, so you don't have your full protection until a couple of weeks after you get your shot.

Can reduce flu risk by up to 60%

We typically don't know the effectiveness of the vaccine until we really get into flu season and we can see what types of viruses actually end up circulating in the population. Every year, the flu vaccine is adjusted to align with what is predicted to be the most likely strains circulating. It typically falls somewhere between 40% and 60% effectiveness. In recent years, we typically have seen them reporting closer to 60% for common flu strains, which is great.

Get it as soon as possible

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices is generally recommending what they would recommend every year, which is shoot for September or October to get your flu vaccine. You can start to get your vaccine, ideally before the end of October, but if you don't squeeze it in, go get it any time. Ideally before January is what's best. But we'll tell people all throughout the flu season, if you haven't gotten the vaccine yet, it's still OK to get it and you're likely to benefit.

Everyone should get it, especially seniors

There are a couple reasons why someone might not be able to get the flu vaccine—that's relatively rare. A real allergy to it might be the most common reason, but generally speaking, if you are older than six months old, you should definitely get the flu vaccine. Our seniors, for sure, are a higher-risk population. They have slightly different vaccine options that are designed to protect them a little bit more. Because they are also clearly one

of those high-risk populations for COVID, it is even more important for them to protect themselves against the flu as well.

There are nasal sprays too

The sprays are only approved for ages 2 through 49. There are some medical conditions or reasons why you may not be able to get the spray, or it may not be the best choice for you, but most people can take that option of getting the nasal spray if they really are anxious about getting the shot. It is typically pretty comparable to the shot in terms of effectiveness.

Do it for yourself, do it for others

There are benefits to us as individuals: We're less likely to get the flu. Even if we do develop the flu, we're less likely to need to be hospitalized and it tends to be less severe if you get the vaccine. It is also about protecting others—your family, friends, community members. The flu vaccine is most effective for all of us when more of us get it, so we can get closer to achieving—at least for flu season—that herd immunity. Getting the flu shot is not just doing something for yourself, but it definitely is a way you can contribute to good health in your community.

There are many ways to get it

This year, we're going to see a real decline in employers offering the flu shot with so many people working from home. That's definitely a concern. There's going to be a big awareness push to help people find where they can get their flu shots.

You have a lot of options in terms of where you can receive the flu shot. We usually suggest that people reach out to their primary care doctor's office first. Primary care physician offices usually have lots of options for how you can come in and get your flu shot, but there are other places as well. Like Women's Health Center!