

Flu Facts & Responses to Common Concerns

- **Influenza is a serious disease** of the nose, throat, and lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. Most who die are 65 years and older, however children less than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to be hospitalized because of the flu.^{1, 15, 25}
- Flu viruses change from year to year, therefore **you must receive the flu vaccine annually**. A vaccine made to protect against flu viruses circulating in one season may not protect against the newer strains of the virus circulating in the current season. Also, you can get the flu more than once during your lifetime, so immunity from one shot doesn't last for an entire lifetime.^{1, 15, 25}
- Getting the flu vaccine is **convenient** and easy. [EXPLAIN YOUR ORGANIZATION'S FLU CLINIC TIMES / PLACES / ETC.]
- **The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu.**
 - The flu shot, an inactivated vaccine containing killed virus (also known as TIV for trivalent, inactivated flu vaccine) is made from dead viruses and cannot give you the flu.^{1, 15, 25}
 - The nasal-spray flu vaccine, a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses (sometimes called LAIV for live, attenuated influenza vaccine) does not cause the flu either. Attenuated means the viruses are weakened and will not cause severe symptoms often associated with influenza illness. LAIV is cold-adapted and temperature-sensitive, meaning the viruses can grow in the nose and throat, but not in the lower respiratory tract where the temperature is higher.^{1, 15, 25}
 - Some people experience a little soreness or redness where they get the shot. This soreness goes away in a day or two. Serious problems from the flu shot are very rare.^{1, 15, 25}
- Most of the time **the flu vaccine will prevent the flu.**
 - Studies have shown that the inactivated flu shot (TIV) is 70% to 90% effective in preventing the flu among healthy persons <65 years of age; 50% to 60% effective in preventing hospitalization; and 80% effective in preventing death.¹⁵
 - Further, studies have demonstrated that the nasal-spray flu vaccine (LAIV) is responsible for 20% fewer severe febrile illness episodes; 24% fewer febrile upper respiratory illness episodes; 27% fewer lost work days due to febrile upper respiratory illness; 18-37% fewer days of healthcare provider visits due to febrile illness; and 41-45% fewer days of antibiotic use.¹⁵
 - **Getting the vaccine is your best protection against the disease.**

- **Side effects from the flu vaccine are very rare;** the worst side effect you're likely to get from the flu shot is a sore arm. The nasal-spray flu vaccine might cause nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, or cough. The risk of a severe allergic reaction from the flu shot is less than 1 in 4 million. Serious adverse reactions are very rare. They are explained on the Vaccine Information Statement (VIS) developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is distributed when the vaccine is administered. Local short-term reactions – such as soreness at the vaccination site, slight fever, and achy feeling – may occur but usually do not last long. Over-the-counter medicines are helpful. Overall, short-term reactions are much less bothersome than catching the flu and feeling very sick for days.^{1, 15, 25}
- **Anyone who wishes to reduce the likelihood of getting the flu should get vaccinated.** Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease need to get vaccinated annually against influenza. Doctors also recommend children 6 months through 18 years of age get flu vaccine every year. HCP are in a high-risk group, because they may be infected with the flu virus but not feel ill, transmitting flu to at-risk patients.^{1, 15, 25}
- **Most HCP can receive the nasal spray flu vaccine instead of the flu shot.** Patients and HCP alike don't always like needles or shots. However, the health benefits from vaccination are unmatched by any other prevention tool. For those who don't like shots, intranasal flu vaccine can be given to healthy non-pregnant persons 2-49 years of age, including HCP. HCP caring for severely immunosuppressed patients - those requiring a protective environment (such as a hospital room with reverse air flow) should receive injectable influenza vaccine (TIV). [IF THE ORGANIZATION'S FLU PROGRAM PROVIDES THE NASAL VACCINE, SUGGEST IT TO PEOPLE UNDER 50 YEARS OF AGE WITHOUT A HIGH RISK CONDITION. FOR EXAMPLE A 45 YEAR OLD HCP WITH ASTHMA SHOULD NOT RECEIVE NASAL FLU VACCINE].
- **You can be infected, not feel ill, and still transmit flu to at-risk patients.** No one is immune from the flu virus. Studies show that most healthy adults can infect others with the flu up to 1 day before they start having symptoms and once sick, they can infect others for up to 5 days. Only about 50% of infected persons will develop the classic clinical symptoms of influenza.^{1, 15, 25}
- Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. The best time to get vaccinated is October or November, but **you can still get vaccinated in December or later** and be protected from the flu. HCP should be [vaccinated throughout the entire flu season.](#)^{1, 15, 25}

This document was adapted from the California Adult Immunization Coalition.