

Frequently asked questions About the flu

Q: Will I get the flu from the flu shot?

A: No. The flu vaccine is created from dead or inactive viruses that are noninfectious.

Q: Do I need a flu shot every year?

A: Yes. Influenza viruses change every year. A new vaccine is used annually to fight the most current influenza virus. In addition, the antibody a person develops from the vaccine declines over time.

Q: When should I get a flu shot?

A: Influenza can occur from October until May, with activity usually peaking between January and February. The optimal time for flu shots is before December; however, it is clinically beneficial to be vaccinated in February or even later.

Q: Why should I get a flu shot?

A: Influenza usually leaves its victims unable to function for several days and is responsible for more than 200,000 hospitalizations each year. Getting an annual flu shot is your best protection.

Q: Who should get a flu shot?

A: Anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu should get vaccinated. It is recommended you receive a flu shot if you meet the criteria of high risk (see classification of high risk) or if you fall under one of the following categories:

- + Children 6 months up to their 19th birthday
- + Pregnant women
- + People 50 years of age and older
- + People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease)
- + People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- + People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu

Q: Can I still get the flu after I get the flu shot?

A: Yes. Like other vaccines, the flu vaccine is not 100% effective and does not take effect until about two weeks after it is received. During this time, you will be just as susceptible to contract the flu as individuals who have not received the vaccination. Still, the best option to prevent the flu is to get an annual flu shot.

Q: Will I need a separate shot for the H1N1 virus?

A: No. The vaccine for H1N1 is now included in the standard flu shot.

Q: Am I classified as high-risk?

A: There may be times when the flu vaccine is only available to high-risk groups. You may qualify for the vaccine if you fall under one of the following high-risk categories:

- + All children aged 6-59 months (6 months to 4 years)
- + Anyone 50 years of age or older
- + Children and adolescents (aged 6 months-18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- + Women who are pregnant during flu season
- + Adults and children who have chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus)
- + Adults and children who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by human immunodeficiency virus)
- + Adults and children who have any condition (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders or other neuromuscular disorders) that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions, or that can increase the risk for aspiration
- + Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities
- + Health care personnel
- + Healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of children aged less than 5 years and adults aged 50 years and older, with particular emphasis on vaccinating contacts of children aged less than 6 months
- + Healthy household contacts (including children) and caregivers of persons with medical conditions that put them at higher risk for severe complications from influenza

Q: What are the side effects of getting a flu shot?

A: The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Almost all people who receive the influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it. The most common side effects are soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given, a low-grade fever and aches. These potential side effects begin soon after the shot is administered and usually last one to two days. Rare side effects include severe allergic reactions. Anyone who is allergic to chicken eggs should avoid being vaccinated, since the virus used is grown in these eggs.

Visit bcbsnc.com/flu for more answers to your flu-related questions.