

## INFLUENZA VACCINE

### **What is the flu?**

“The flu” (influenza) is an acute respiratory illness caused by infection with influenza viruses type A, B, or C. The most extensive and severe outbreaks are caused by influenza A viruses. These influenza viruses should not be confused with a *bacterial* infection caused by Haemophilus influenza, for which children receive a different vaccine (HiB = Haemophilus influenza type B).

Flu symptoms are much worse than your typical common cold and include: high fever, shaking chills, muscle aches, runny nose, sore throat, loss of appetite, cough, headache, and general fatigue.

Although most people begin recovering after about 3 days, complications such as pneumonia can occur.

### **What are the different vaccines available?**

Influenza immunization is available as an inactivated (killed) vaccine, given as a shot.

A live, weakened influenza vaccine is also available for healthy people age 2 to 49. It is considered as or more effective than the killed vaccine and is administered in the nose (no needle). With the nasal spray, some people may experience flu-like symptoms that are milder than the flu and do not last long. It does not usually cause illness or flu complications.

### **Why get the flu shot?**

Influenza is the number one cause of vaccine preventable deaths in the United States.

While decreasing deaths among the young, the old, and the chronically ill is worthwhile enough, decreased absenteeism from school or work (while being sick with a case of the flu) is a good reason healthy people seek immunization.

### **Who should get the flu vaccine?**

There is ample supply this year and influenza vaccine is recommended for children 6 months to 18 years. Persons at high risk (for complications including death if they contract influenza) should receive the vaccine and include: All children 6 months to 5 years or anyone older than 50, people with long term health problems [(heart/ lung/ kidney disease, diabetes, blood disorders, neuromuscular disorders, weakened immune system (HIV/AIDS, long-term steroid use, cancer treatment)], and women who will be pregnant during influenza season. People who can spread influenza to those at high risk (household members and healthcare providers) should also be vaccinated.

### **Am I guaranteed not to get the flu after my immunization?**

The flu vaccine does not protect against all respiratory illnesses during cold and flu season. It is still possible to get ill from strains of the flu that were not included in that year’s vaccine as well as other respiratory viruses and bacteria. Even with those limitations known, the decreased illness that results from vaccinations makes it beneficial for employers to offer their employees flu vaccine each fall.

### **Why do I have to get another flu shot every fall? Isn’t last year’s still effective?**

Because of the tendency for the influenza virus to reshuffle and mutate its genes, the human population may be exposed to a virus for which they have not built up immunity from prior exposure. Vaccines become available annually in October for the flu season that runs from November thru March in the United States.

### **What is bird flu that I heard about last flu season?**

Avian flu is an infection affecting birds in Asia. It has spread from birds to some humans causing illness and death. The concern is that a pandemic (extensive epidemic) may occur if a mutation makes human-to-human spread easier.

For more information on vaccines, visit the CDC web site at [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)  
For additional information on this and other health issues, visit: MedlinePlus.gov  
To see what vaccines you need, visit our website at EMCexpresscare.com