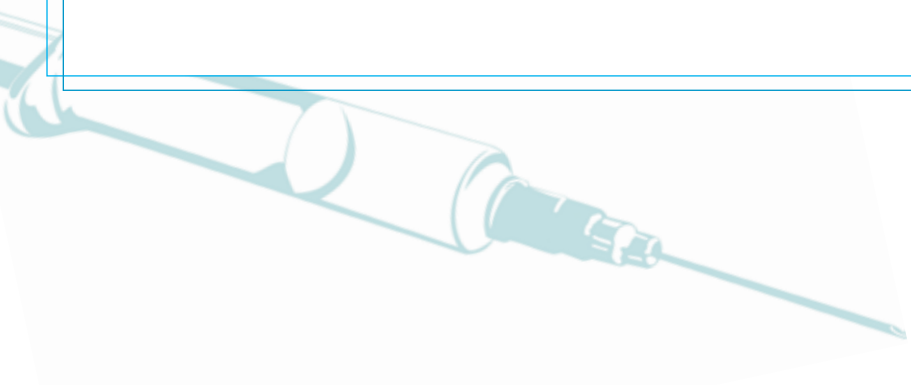
Mini Guide to Flu & Flu Vaccines



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National Vaccine Information Center

Mini Guide to Flu & Flu Vaccines

Influenza or "flu" viruses circulate in human and animal populations around the world. Influenza vaccines were developed in the mid-20th century and primarily recommended for people over age 65 until about a decade ago, when public health doctors began to urge younger Americans to get an annual flu shot.

Today, public health doctors in the U.S. strongly promote annual flu shots for everyone beginning at the age of six months and throughout life.

This Mini Guide to Flu & Flu Vaccines is a brief summary of facts about influenza and influenza vaccines. For more information and a list of references, go to www.NVIC.org

What Is Influenza?

The "flu" is a respiratory illness associated with type A or type B influenza viruses. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Feeling very tired

About 80 percent of all "flu-like" illness is NOT caused by either type A or type B influenza viruses. Most of the time when people have symptoms of the "flu," it is associated with other viruses or bacteria.

When many people in a state, country or certain region of the world experience type A or type B influenza, it is called an influenza *epidemic*.

Pandemic Influenza

Sometimes a new strain of influenza suddenly appears and very few, if any, people have had experience with it and so there is little natural or "herd" immunity in human populations. This means people in many countries may get the new strain of influenza, especially younger people who have limited natural experience with getting sick and recovering from influenza.

When there are outbreaks of illness around the world due to a new strain of the flu, it is called an *influenza pandemic*.

In 1918, a new strain of H1N1 type A influenza that originated in pigs (swine) suddenly emerged and caused many deaths around the world, primarily from complications involving bacterial pneumonia at a time when antibiotics were not available. It was called the great "Spanish Flu" pandemic.

No influenza epidemic or pandemic in the past century has been associated with as many deaths.

2009 H1N1 "Swine Flu" Pandemic

In early 2009, a hybrid swine -bird-human H1N1 influenza strain was identified in Mexico. An international *influenza pandemic* was immediately declared by public health doctors.

However, the 2009 pandemic did not cause widespread serious illness and death. It is thought that the low death rate was partly due to the fact that human populations already had acquired natural herd immunity from being exposed to related H1N1 flu strains that have been circulating since 1918.

How Serious is The Flu?

Most children and adults recover from the flu without any complications and are left with natural immunity to the flu strain that made them sick. Rare complications include bacterial pneumonia, which can be fatal.

Every year, public health doctors at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) make a "guesstimate" about how many Americans die from complications of the flu. In 2009, which was a pandemic year, doctors estimated that about 12,000 Americans (out of 308 million) died from influenza-related illness.

The CDC lists the following high risk factors that could predispose a person to having a complication if they get sick with the flu, although there may be other factors that could increase influenza risks for an individual:

- people over age 65
- young children
- pregnant women
- people with chronic illness, such as asthma, diabetes, heart or kidney disease, blood disorders or serious autoimmunity

How Do You Get the Flu?

Public health doctors believe that influenza viruses spread from person to person by coughing and sneezing and that people are contagious for about a week after symptoms begin. Doctors don't know all the reasons why some people - whether they have gotten a flu shot or not – get sicker than others or do not get sick at all when they come into close contact with someone, who is sick with the flu.

As with any respiratory illness, if you have a high fever or a severe headache that persists for days; if you become dehydrated; if you have trouble breathing or if your symptoms worsen instead of improving within a week, you should immediately see a doctor.

Common Sense Ways to Protect Yourself

Most healthy people, who get type A or type B influenza, are left with long lasting, natural immunity that helps protect them when that strain or a similar strain of influenza circulates again in the future. Here are some common sense ways to help you avoid getting the flu and also help you heal faster if you do get the flu:

1. Wash your hands frequently.
2. Avoid close contact with those who are sick.
3. If you are sick, avoid close contact with those who are well.
4. Cover your mouth if you cough or sneeze.
5. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
6. Get adequate sleep and lower stress.
7. Eat healthy foods rich in vitamins D and C (take a vitamin D supplement in the winter or all year around if you are indoors most of the time)
8. Exercise regularly when you are well.
9. Consider holistic options to heal and stay well, such as chiropractic, homeopathic, naturopathic and acupuncture.

The Influenza Vaccine

There are two kinds of influenza vaccines. Flu shots containing inactivated (killed) flu viruses are injected with a needle. Flu vaccines containing live but weakened flu viruses are inhaled when squirted into the nose using a nasal spray.

Every year, public health doctors select three influenza virus strains to include in the annual flu shot: two type A flu strains and one type B flu strain. They try to pick flu strains they think will be circulating in most countries.

Sometimes the flu shot does not contain the flu virus strains that are associated with most cases of the flu in a given year.

Influenza Vaccine Ingredients

Right now, influenza vaccine virus is grown in the fluids of chicken embryos but vaccine manufacturers are experimenting with using other growth mediums like insect cells and dog kidney cells for production. It is a good idea to always read the manufacturer product information insert for a description of how a vaccine is made.

For injected flu shots that come from multi-dose vials, the three strains of influenza virus are inactivated with formaldehyde and preserved with a mercury-based chemical (Thimerosal). The inhaled live virus flu vaccine does not contain mercury.

Depending upon the drug company manufacturing the vaccine, flu shots may contain different additional ingredients in varying amounts, such as:

- Mercury
- Formaldehyde, MSG and other chemicals
- Egg protein
- Antibiotics
- Gelatin
- Sucrose

Vaccine product information inserts listing vaccine ingredients and the Vaccine Ingredient Calculator are available at NVIC.org.

Have Flu Vaccines Been Proven Safe & Effective?

Although public health doctors now recommend that all Americans from six months of age through year of death get an annual flu shot, there have been no large, well designed, long term studies to demonstrate that this policy is necessary, safe or effective. A comprehensive review of published influenza studies revealed that most studies are flawed and have not demonstrated that influenza vaccine is safe or effective in preventing influenza in adults or children.

Vaccines, including flu shots, stimulate a temporary, partial immunity. Vaccination does not exactly mimic the natural disease process and does not give longer lasting immunity that most healthy people get naturally after experiencing and recovering from infectious diseases, including influenza.

Can Flu Vaccines Cause injury or Death?

Vaccines, like prescription drugs, are pharmaceutical products that carry a risk of injury or death. Vaccine risks can be greater for some than others depending upon a person's health at the time of vaccination, personal and family medical history, whether there has been a previous vaccine reaction, and other factors.

Vaccines stimulate the immune system to mount a temporary inflammatory response so antibodies are produced. Sometimes the inflammatory response stimulated by vaccination does not resolve and leads to chronic inflammation in the body that causes serious, permanent health problems or even death.

Always read the vaccine manufacturer's product information insert for descriptions of vaccine studies, precautions and reported vaccine reactions, injuries and deaths. You can also view vaccine reaction reports at NVIC.org.

Are Some People At Higher Risk for Vaccine Reactions?

Like with prescription drugs, adverse responses to vaccines can vary from person to person. The CDC lists the following high risk factors that can predispose a person to having a serious reaction to a flu shot:

- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past.
- People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever at the time of vaccination
- People who developed Guillian-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously.
- Children younger than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for use in this age group).

There may be other biological or environmental factors that could increase vaccine risks for you or your child. For example, there are no large, well designed, long term studies evaluating the potential negative effects on mother or unborn child of giving pregnant women flu shots in any trimester.

NOTE: People less than two years of age, over 49 years old, who are pregnant, who have a weakened immune system or are in close contact with someone with a severely weakened immune system should not get the live virus nasal spray flu vaccine.

If you are thinking about getting a flu shot, the National Vaccine Information Center recommends you ask yourself the following questions and discuss any concerns with one or more trusted health care professionals BEFORE making a vaccination decision for yourself or your child.

IF You Vaccinate, Ask Eight

1. Am I or my child sick right now?
2. Have I or my child had a bad reaction to a vaccination before?
3. Do I or my child have a personal or family history of vaccine reactions, neurological disorders, severe allergies or immune system problems?
4. Do I know the disease and vaccine risks for myself or my child?
5. Do I have full information about the vaccine's side effects?
6. Do I know how to identify and report a vaccine reaction?
7. Do I know I need to keep a written record, including the vaccine manufacturer's name and lot number, for all vaccinations?
8. Do I know I have the right to make an informed choice?

Under the U.S. National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, more than $2 billion has been awarded to children and adults for whom the risks of vaccination were 100% and caused injury or death.

Report Vaccine Reactions

The 1986 Vaccine Injury Act mandated that all vaccine providers report serious health problems following vaccination, including hospitalizations, injuries and deaths, to the federal Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS).

If you or your child have experienced serious health problems following vaccination and the person who gave the shots refuses to make an adverse event report to VAERS, you can make the report yourself. Go to NVIC.org to learn more.

Flu Vaccine Mandates

National polls conducted between 2005 and 2010 found that more than 60 percent of Americans, including health care workers, do not want to get an annual flu shot even in pandemic years. Most Americans, who do not get an annual flu shot, are concerned about the lack of scientific evidence that influenza vaccine is necessary, safe or effective.

In 2008, public health doctors in New Jersey added influenza vaccine to the list of mandated vaccines for children attending day care and pre-school. In 2009, annual flu shots became a job requirement for more health care workers. By 2010, some employees were being fired from hospitals if they refused annual flu shots.

The National Vaccine Information Center opposes intimidation and sanctions against any American, who declines a flu shot, because it violates the ethical principle of voluntary, informed consent to medical risk-taking.

National Vaccine Information Center

This information is brought to you by the National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC), a non-profit charity founded in 1982 by parents of vaccine injured children. NVIC launched and has led the U.S. vaccine safety and informed consent movement to prevent vaccine injuries and deaths through public education and to defend the informed consent ethic in medicine.

You can help NVIC protect and expand vaccine exemptions in your state and all states by registering with NVIC's Advocacy Portal at NVICadvocacy.org. Please adopt NVIC as one of your favorite charities by becoming a supporter and donating annually.

NVIC: A Partner with Mercola.com

NVIC is a partner with Dr. Joseph Mercola and Mercola.com in jointly sponsoring an annual Vaccine Awareness Week (VAW) Nov. 1-7. To learn more and to make a charitable contribution to support NVIC's educational and health choice advocacy programs, go to NVIC.org.

It's Your Health. Your family. Your Choice.

National Vaccine Information Center

www.nvic.org

Protecting health and defending informed consent rights since 1982.

Your Donations to the NVIC help fund efforts that raise vaccine awareness, including the following excellent vaccine resources:

- State Vaccine Requirements
  http://www.nvic.org/Vaccine-Laws/state-vaccine-requirements.aspx
- Are You Over Vaccinating Your Child?
  http://www.nvic.org/Downloads/49-Doses-PosterB.aspx
- Vaccine Ingredients Calculator
  http://www.vaccine-tlc.org/
- How to Legally Avoid Immunizations
  http://mercola.fileburst.com/PDF/Immunization.pdf