

What should I know about flu vaccines?

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Getting a flu vaccine is the best way to keep from getting the flu. Everyone who is 6 months of age and older should get one. It's especially important for infants and young children, pregnant women, those aged 65 and older, those with chronic health conditions, and those with weakened immune systems to get a vaccine to prevent the flu. Child care providers should be sure to get their flu vaccine because they take care of those at risk for complications—infants and children.

REMEMBER: You cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine!

Here is what you will find in this newsletter:

- When to get vaccinated and why you need to get a vaccine every year
- What types of flu vaccine are available
- Whether or not you can get the flu after getting a vaccine
- What viruses the vaccine protects against
- How safe the vaccine is

**Questions? Contact the
Arkansas Department of Health at
501-661-2169 or
www.healthy.arkansas.gov.**

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1401 West Capitol Avenue
Suite 300, Victory Building
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
www.achi.net

When should I get the vaccine?

Get the vaccine as soon as it is available to you and early each flu season, in the fall. Flu season usually peaks in January or February, but lasts as late as May. However, it's never too late to get the vaccine.

Visit flushot.healthmap.org to find out where you can get a flu vaccine.

There are times when you may want to delay getting a flu vaccine. For example, if you have a fever, you should wait until the fever is gone. Check with your health provider about the best time for you to get your flu vaccine.

The flu vaccine will protect you over one season.

Why do I need a vaccination every year?

Flu vaccines are needed every year because flu viruses constantly change. The flu vaccine is created annually to match the viruses most likely to be around that season.

Your body's immunity to flu viruses also declines over time so getting a flu vaccine each year gives you the best protection.

What types of flu vaccine are available?

There are two types of vaccines: the flu shot and the nasal spray.

The flu shot is:

- made with killed flu viruses (inactivated),
- given by needle, and
- approved for use in healthy people aged 6 months and older and those with chronic health conditions like asthma or diabetes.

The nasal spray is:

- made with live but weakened flu viruses (also called LAIV for "live attenuated influenza vaccine");
- given with a mist sprayed in your nose; and
- approved for use in healthy people between the ages of 2 and 49 years, except pregnant women and those with health conditions that can be complicated by the flu.



Credit: CDC/James Gathany (2006)

Can I get the flu even if I got a flu vaccine?

It's possible to still get the flu after you get a vaccine because it takes up to 2 weeks for your body to create antibodies against the flu. You are still at risk during that time. That is why it's best to get your vaccine early in the flu season.

What do the vaccines this season protect against?

These vaccines protect against the three flu viruses that research suggests will be most common during the upcoming season. The viruses in the vaccine can change each year based on

international surveillance and scientists' estimations about which types and strains of viruses will circulate in a given year.

The flu vaccine this season (2012–2013) is made from these viruses:

- A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like virus
- A/Victoria/361/2011 (H3N2)-like virus
- B/Wisconsin/1/2010-like virus

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. Like any medicine, there's a small risk of a side effect or bad reaction, but most are minor and go away within a few days.

Vaccines must go through years of testing before they are licensed to be used with people. Sometimes the process can take longer than 10 years! Once in use, vaccines are constantly checked for safety and effectiveness by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and the FDA (Food and Drug Administration).

Will I need to pay for the vaccine?

Most health insurance plans cover the cost of vaccines, but you should check with your insurance company. The Affordable Care Act now requires that many insurance plans must cover the cost of preventive services, like the flu vaccine and others, at no cost to you or with a small co-pay.

If you don't have insurance or if it doesn't cover vaccines, talk with your health provider about possible options and programs available to help. You can also visit www.vaccines.gov for more information or check out the websites of vaccine makers, like GlaxoSmithKline, Sanofi Pasteur, and Merck. Many of these companies have programs to help people get vaccines at no cost or very low cost.

Where can I find more information about flu vaccines?

Visit these websites for more information.

- US Department of Health and Social Services (www.flu.gov and www.vaccines.gov)
- CDC (www.cdc.gov/flu)

If you have any questions, please contact the Arkansas Department of Health by calling 501-661-2169 or visiting their website at www.healthy.arkansas.gov.

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine. *Seasonal Influenza (Flu)*. Retrieved December 18, 2012 from <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm>.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Vaccination & Vaccine Safety. *Prevention and Vaccination*. Retrieved December 18, 2012 from <http://www.flu.gov/prevention-vaccination/vaccination/index.html#>.

What are common side effects?

Side effects of the flu shot:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Mild fever
- Aches

Side effects of the nasal spray:

- Runny nose
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Cough