

Flu Shot

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[Who Should Get a Flu Shot?](#) **What Is the Flu Shot?**

The flu shot is a vaccine that protects against the influenza virus. Like other shots you've had, it helps your body fight infections. The flu shot contains a small amount of dead, or killed, flu viruses. The flu shot won't give you the flu, but those dead viruses are enough to get your body's immune system ready to fight off the real flu when it comes around this winter.

Who Should Get a Flu Shot?

Almost anyone can get a flu shot, but most kids who are healthy don't need it because even if they get the flu, they'll probably just be sick for a little while and then get better. But there are some kids who may get very sick if they catch the flu, so doctors recommend that these kids get the flu shot. Kids who have asthma or other lung problems, heart problems, kidney disease, diabetes, HIV, or sickle cell anemia should get a flu shot every year. If you have one of these or some other medical problem, you might want to ask your parent to call the doctor about getting a flu shot.

Another reason to get a flu shot is to protect someone in your family who might get very sick if that person caught the flu. The idea is this: if you don't get the flu, you can't spread it to anyone else. If you live with someone who has any of the medical problems listed above and you get the flu, that person could get very sick. Older people should get flu shots because their immune systems (the body's disease-fighting system) aren't as strong as yours. So if you live with your grandparents, getting a flu shot will help to protect them.

Babies and little kids can get very sick from the flu, and doctors encourage parents to have their kids who are between 6 months and 2 years old get flu shots. Babies younger than 6 months old also could get very sick from the flu, but they are too young for a flu shot. So if you have a new brother or sister or if your mom is going to have a baby soon, you and your family might want to get flu shots to prevent her and the new baby from getting sick.

It is safe for most people to get a flu shot, but there are a few exceptions. Although babies get lots of other shots, they cannot get a flu shot until they are older than 6 months old.

People who are allergic to chicken or eggs also should not get a flu shot. The viruses used for flu shots are actually grown inside eggs. (And you thought only chickens hatched from eggs!) So if you're allergic to chicken or eggs, let your doctor know!

People who should get a flu shot need to get one every year. That's because the viruses that cause the flu keep changing. The virus that makes people sick one year might not be around the next year. Each year doctors and scientists who study the flu try to predict which virus will make people sick during the next flu season. Then they make the vaccine out of a mixture of the three most likely viruses.

So every year a new vaccine has to be made. That means that even if someone had a flu shot last year, the person will need the new shot to be protected against this season's flu viruses. If you are younger than 9 years old and have never had a flu shot before, you will need two shots a month apart. Everyone else needs only one shot each year.

The flu shot is very safe, and most people have no problems with it. Occasionally, the spot where you got the shot might feel sore. After the flu shot, some people might feel achy or have a mild fever, but that's nothing like the flu, which can make you sick for 1 or 2 weeks.

No one wants a shot, but it could prevent you from getting the flu and some serious complications of the flu, like pneumonia.

Flu shots are meant to keep you from getting sick, but it will only protect you from the flu. Unfortunately, there are a lot of other viruses out there that cause colds and flu-like illnesses. So even if you've had your flu shot, it's important to wash your hands often to keep from spreading these germs.

Remember, not everyone needs a flu shot. If you have questions, talk to your doctor or have your parent call to see if you're someone who could use one!