



A flu shot ... or not?

Just around the corner is that time of year when unwelcome visitors seek to invade your body and disrupts your life. That's right – it's the flu season. So, should you get a flu vaccination or not? Find out more now to make the right choice.

The flu is a virus

Well, influenza, or the flu, is a viral infection that attacks your breathing system: your nose, throat, and lungs. Some people just let the virus run its course. But sometimes flu complications can be deadly. With new strains and strengths of viruses, many people now choose to vaccinate every season.

Who is at high risk of flu complications?

- People with weakened immune systems
- People with chronic illnesses such as asthma, heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes
- Children under five years, especially those under two years
- Adults older than 65 years
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- Pregnant women
- People who are obese, with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher

Best time to vaccinate?

The flu vaccine usually becomes available in winter; this is the best time to vaccinate before the virus spreads and you catch the flu. You can still get vaccinated any time during winter.

Flu shot

What is it? It's a needle jab into an arm muscle. The jab contains an inactivated vaccine made up of a killed virus.

Who can get it? Anyone aged six months or older. Children between six months and eight years may need two doses of a flu vaccine, given at least four weeks apart, for full protection: check with your children's healthcare provider.

Will the shot give me flu? Because the viruses are killed (inactivated), the shot won't cause you to get the flu. But it will enable your body to develop the antibodies necessary to ward off influenza viruses.

Possible side effects: You may experience muscle ache and fever for a day or two after receiving a flu shot. This may be a side effect of your body's production of protective antibodies.

Why vaccinate every year?

Flu viruses constantly adapt and change. So last year's vaccine may not protect you from this year's viruses. New flu vaccines become available every year to keep up.

Why did I still catch the flu after a vaccine?

This could seem to happen for a few reasons:

- **Two-week window period:** After the flu shot, the body takes two weeks to develop antibodies. If you're exposed to a flu virus shortly before or during this time, you could catch the flu.
- **Mismatched flu virus:** In some years, the influenza viruses used for the vaccine don't match the viruses circulating during flu season. This makes the flu shot less effective. It will still offer some protection.
- **Other illnesses:** Many other diseases (like the common cold) produce similar symptoms to the flu. So you may think you have the flu when you don't.

This mailer contains opinions, facts, and references to other information sources. For any personal health advice, always consult a registered healthcare professional.