Flu vaccines

Why should I get a flu vaccine?
The flu vaccine can help protect you from getting seasonal influenza, also called the flu. This disease is caused by viruses that infect your nose, throat, and lungs. The flu is a serious disease that can cause life-threatening problems.

Each year, 5% to 20% of Americans get the flu and more than 200,000 are hospitalized with flu complications. Over the past 30 years, deaths from the flu have ranged from about 3,000 to 49,000 people. Most people who die from the flu are age 65 and older.

Each flu season is different. Some years can be mild and others are severe. You should get a vaccine every year because flu viruses change and the vaccine is updated each year.

Flu season starts in October and can last until May of the next year. Getting a flu vaccine every year is the best way to reduce your chances of getting the flu. The vaccine doesn’t guarantee that you won’t get the flu. It decreases your chances of getting the flu and its complications. It also helps to prevent the spread of the flu from person to person.

Nearly all adults and children age 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine. It’s especially important for people with asthma, diabetes, and lung disease because they’re at a higher risk for flu complications such as pneumonia. Pregnant women, children under age 5, and adults over age 65 are also at a higher risk.

How does the flu vaccine work?
Within about 2 weeks after you get the vaccine, your body produces antibodies that protect you from the flu virus. The protection you get from the vaccine will last through the flu season.

It’s available as an injection (flu shot) or a nasal spray. Your healthcare provider can tell you which is better for you.

When should I get a flu vaccine?
The best time is as soon as possible. Most years it’s available in October, but you can get it at any time and it will protect you throughout the flu season, which can last as late as May.

Where can I get a flu vaccine?
Vaccines are available at many places, including your healthcare provider’s office, a local clinic, pharmacies, and college health centers. Some employers offer flu vaccines to their workers. To find out where to get one near you, visit http://vaccine.healthmap.org.

Will the flu vaccine give me the flu?
No. Most people have no ill effects from the vaccine, but you may experience some mild side effects if you get the flu shot, such as soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given. A few people get a low fever and feel achy. Adults who get the nasal spray may have a headache, sore throat, cough, and a runny nose.

Can the flu vaccine cause other problems?
Most people who receive the flu vaccine have no problems. A few will have an allergic reaction to the vaccine that can be serious. Let your healthcare provider know right away if you have any symptoms such as trouble breathing, hives, weakness, a fast heartbeat, or dizziness.

Most vaccines are made with a very small amount of egg. Be sure to tell the healthcare provider who is giving the vaccine if you’re allergic to eggs. Many people with an egg allergy can still get the flu vaccine.