Influenza (Flu)

**Should I get a flu vaccination this year?**
Yes. Everyone older than 6 months of age should get flu vaccine this year. Even if you got seasonal flu vaccine last year and/or the H1N1 vaccine, you should still get seasonal flu vaccine again this year.

Getting a flu shot (or nasal spray) means you won’t catch the flu, so you won’t pass it to people who risk getting very sick -- like babies, pregnant women, elderly people, and people who have chronic diseases.

**Who is most at risk for getting very sick from influenza?**
Those most at risk for becoming seriously ill from the flu include:

- people age 65 and older
- young children
- pregnant women
- people with certain health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease
- African Americans, Hispanics, and Native peoples

**What is influenza (flu)?**
Influenza is a contagious respiratory disease that can be prevented by immunization. It is not the same as the “stomach flu.” Flu is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death.

**What are the symptoms of flu?**
Influenza symptoms come on quickly in the form of fever, dry cough, sore throat, headache, extreme tiredness, stuffed-up nose, and body aches. These symptoms can be severe and put you in bed for several days.

**How is the flu different from a cold?**
A cold generally stays up in the head while the flu brings body aches, fever, and extreme fatigue. A person with a cold will usually keep up his or her normal activities, while someone with the flu will often feel too sick to do so.

**Do children need one or two doses of flu vaccine?**
That will depend on the child’s age and whether they got flu vaccine this past year. If your child is 6 months through 8 years old, he or she may need two doses, at least four weeks apart. Ask your doctor or clinic.

**I heard that this year’s flu vaccine has H1N1 in it. Is it safe?**
Yes. This year’s flu vaccine is made in the same way as past flu vaccines. Flu vaccines have an excellent safety record – with an average of 100 million doses used in the U.S. each year.

Everyone older than 6 months of age should get flu vaccine this year.

**Are we still in an H1N1 flu pandemic?**
No, but we expect the H1N1 flu strain to continue to circulate and cause disease this season. That’s why the H1N1 strain of the virus is included in this year’s seasonal flu vaccine.

**Can you get the flu from the flu shot?**
No. Some people do get mild flu-like symptoms for a short time after being vaccinated, but this is a sign that your body is responding to the vaccine and giving you protection. It is not the flu. Also, because there are many cold viruses circulating in the fall, it is possible that a person could be infected and become ill at the same time they receive the flu vaccine.

**What if you already had H1N1 flu disease last season?**
Even if you had H1N1 flu, other strains of flu virus that are included in the vaccine will be circulating this season, and it is important to be protected from those as well.
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I just got flu vaccine last spring. Is it too soon to get another flu shot now?
No, it’s not too soon. Other strains of flu virus that are included in this season’s vaccine will be circulating, and it is important to be protected from those as well.

What about the nasal vaccine, FluMist?
Healthy people 2 through 49 years of age, including those who spend time with or are caregivers of infants under 6 months of age, can receive FluMist. Check with your doctor or clinic.

What can you do to protect yourself and others?
- Get vaccinated.
- Avoid being exposed to others who are sick with a flu-like illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Clean your hands often – with soap and water, or a hand sanitizer.
- Take special care to protect infants. Try not to expose them to large crowds when flu is in your community, and avoid close contact between the baby and family members who may be sick.
- Do not share drinking cups and straws.
- Clean commonly touched surfaces often (door knobs, refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets).
- Do not smoke around children.

What if you think you have the flu?
- Stay home if you are ill.
- Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Antibiotics will not help a person recover from the flu, because flu is caused by a virus, not by bacteria.
- Children often need help keeping their fever under control. Follow your child’s doctor’s instructions.
- Take your child to the doctor or the emergency room if he or she:
  - Breathes rapidly or with difficulty
  - Has bluish skin color
  - Does not drink enough and becomes dehydrated
  - Does not wake up or interact with others
  - Is so irritable that he or she doesn’t want to be held, or
  - Gets better only to become sick again, with fever and a more severe cough

Find a flu shot at www.mdhflu.com

If you are concerned that something does not seem right with your child, call your doctor or clinic.

What about antiviral medicines?
Antiviral medicines can offer some protection, but they are only recommended for use in certain groups of people. If you have questions about antivirals, talk to your doctor.