Influenza, Influenza Vaccines & You

3 Things You Should Know

1. Flu vaccine helps protect you, your family members, and long-term care residents.
2. Flu can be serious for anyone, **but some people are at higher risk for complications,** hospitalizations and even death, such as people who:
   - Are age 65 years or older
   - Are age 5 years or less, especially those age 2 years or less
   - Have certain health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, obesity, or a heart condition
   - Are pregnant
3. **Residents of long-term care facilities are at increased risk** for getting flu and for having severe complications from flu for several reasons.
   - **Risk of getting flu:** The proximity of residents allows viruses like influenza to spread quickly. Older age reduces immunity so the virus can establish infection.
   - **Risk of complications:** Older adults in long-term care have weaker immune systems than younger people and than people who have no underlying health conditions. So, they are more likely to get seriously ill from influenza and need hospitalization, antiviral medication, oxygen and IV fluids. Having flu also raises the risk of secondary infections such as bacterial pneumonia.[2]

In recent years, people 65 years of age & older accounted for:

- **70 – 85% of flu-related deaths**
- **50 – 70% of flu-related hospitalizations[1]**

I've Never Had the Flu. What Does it Look Like when Someone is Sick?

- Flu is a contagious illness **infecting the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs.**
- Flu viruses are **spread through the air by sneezing, coughing, and talking.**
- A lot of people call various illnesses "the flu." Flu vaccine protects against one family of viruses (influenza virus) that causes sudden onset of fever, chills, sore throat, nasal congestion, muscle/body aches and headaches.
- People infected with flu **can spread the virus 1 – 2 days *before* and 5 – 7 days *after* they have symptoms.**
- **Cough and feeling tired may last for up to 2 weeks,** which can keep people out of work and school for extended periods.

References:

[1] Flu and People 65 Years and Older, https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/65over.htm

[2] Influenza in long-term care facilities, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5596516/#:~:text=A%20review%20of%20206%20published,(range%200%E2%80%9055%25)

Why Should I Get Vaccinated?

- Flu outbreaks can occur in any healthcare setting, **including high-risk areas such as long-term care facilities.** This makes flu vaccination a crucial patient safety measure.
    - Studies show that during outbreaks, over 60% of residents can become infected, leading to a 10% death rate and a 29% hospitalization rate among residents.
- If you're vaccinated you can still get flu, but it lowers the risk of severe illness and hospitalization. Flu **vaccination helps people get back to work or school sooner.**

When Does Vaccination Work Best?

How well the flu vaccine works **can vary from season to season.** For example, in the 2019-2020 season, vaccine efficacy was estimated at around 50%, while in the 2020-2021 season, it was over 60%.

Flu vaccine, **given as an injection or nasal spray, works best if given before flu season in early fall.** It should be given annually because flu viruses change each year, and the vaccine is updated to best match that year's strain.

I Got Sick After Getting the Vaccine. Did it Give Me Flu?

Flu vaccine cannot give you the flu. The flu vaccine uses inactivated or killed viruses (the shot) or weakened viruses (nasal spray) to create an immune response, which does not cause infection.

- Symptoms after vaccination are due to the body's immune response to the vaccine, not to flu infection.
- People exposed to flu virus before or just after vaccination can get flu. It takes about 7 to 14 days after vaccination for your immune system to protect you.

When you choose vaccination, you protect yourself, your family, and your residents from serious complications of flu like needing to go to the hospital.

Learn More

- **Influenza (Flu), CDC,** www.cdc.gov/flu/?web=1&wdLOR=c463612A9-D14A-4CE0-9A7B-5C100F858020
- **Ask The Experts About Vaccines: Influenza, Immunize.org,** www.immunize.org/ask-experts/topic/influenza/

Reference:
Increased demand, efficacy among experts' flu vaccine concerns in COVID-19 era, https://dhvi.duke.edu/news/increased-demand-efficacy-among-experts-flu-vaccine-concerns-covid-19-era#:~:text=The%202019%2D20%20flu%20vaccines%20were%20estimated%20to,circulation%20in%20the%20United%20States%20last%20winter.