

Influenza Vaccine Information

Influenza (“flu”) is a contagious virus, which can be spread by coughing, sneezing, or nasal secretions. Rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, symptoms (fever, sore throat, chills, fatigue, cough, headache and muscle aches) last only a few days. However, infants and kids with other health can get much sicker. Flu can cause high fever and pneumonia, and make existing medical conditions worse. It can cause diarrhea and seizures in children. Each year thousands of people die from seasonal influenza and even more require hospitalization. By getting vaccinated you can protect yourself from influenza and may also avoid spreading influenza to others.

There are two types of influenza vaccine:

1. Inactivated (killed) vaccine is given by injection into the muscle.
 2. Live, attenuated (weakened) influenza vaccine (LAIV) is sprayed into the nostrils.
- Influenza viruses are always changing, so annual vaccination is recommended. Each year scientists try to match the viruses in the vaccine to those most likely to cause flu that year. The 2010-2011 vaccine provides protection against A/H1N1 (pandemic) influenza and two other influenza viruses – influenza A/H3N2 and influenza B.

All people 6 months of age and older should get flu vaccine. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of severe influenza and their close contacts, including close contacts of children younger than 6 months. People who got the 2009 H1N1 (pandemic) influenza vaccine, or had pandemic flu in 2009, should still get the 2010-2011 seasonal influenza vaccine.

Getting the vaccine as soon as it is available will provide protection if the flu season comes early. Influenza can occur at any time, but most influenza occurs from November through May, and especially in January and February. Protection takes up to 2 weeks to develop, and lasts about a year.

Most children need one dose of influenza vaccine each year. However, children who are younger than 9 years of age and are receiving their first influenza vaccine need two doses to be protected. After one year of receiving 2 doses, children only need one vaccine annually.

Children who should not receive the influenza vaccine include those with a severe egg allergy, kids who are under 6 months, or children who are moderately or severely ill at the time of their visit. Children who are less than 2 years or who have asthma or wheezing should not take the live attenuated intranasal vaccine but should instead receive the injected vaccine.

A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of a vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely rare. The viruses in influenza vaccine have been killed or are weakened, so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine. However, some mild side effects from the inactivated

immunization are soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given; hoarseness; sore, red or itchy eyes; cough; fever; aches. If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and last 1-2 days. With the LAIV, mild side effects include runny nose, nasal congestion or cough; fever; headache and muscle aches; wheezing; abdominal pain.

Some inactivated influenza vaccine contains a preservative called thimerosal.

Thimerosal-free influenza vaccine is available if you request it. Live attenuated intranasal vaccine does not contain thimerosal.

Life-threatening allergic reactions from vaccines are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot. Millions of doses of both vaccines have been distributed since it was licensed, and the vaccines have not been associated with any serious problems. However, the safety of vaccines is continually being monitored.

Feel free to discuss any questions with our doctors or nurses. We are currently scheduling flu vaccine appointments.