



Protect yourself from the flu. Texas physicians want you to know the facts — the best way to prevent the flu is an annual vaccination.

The Facts About Flu Immunization

The flu is a serious illness. The flu, scientifically known as influenza, is a highly contagious respiratory virus that can infect your nose, throat, and/or lungs. The flu is much more severe than a common cold and can keep you sick for seven to 10 days. Every year, as many as 20 percent of the population — people of all ages — get the flu.

The flu can be especially harmful for older people, young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions, like diabetes, or kidney, heart or lung disease. Mild to severe symptoms usually come on quickly, and can include fever/chills, cough, and body aches. Some 200,000 people are hospitalized each year from flu-related illness, such as pneumonia; some even die. While most healthy people recover from the flu, you can infect others around you, who might suffer more severe illness.

A yearly flu vaccination is important. The single best way to avoid influenza is to get a flu vaccination each year. The flu viruses can change from year to year, so you need a vaccination annually to protect yourself and others from getting sick. Health experts recommend everyone get vaccinated for the flu. The only exception is babies who are younger than six months of age. Two types of flu vaccine are available — the flu shot and nasal-spray flu vaccine. Talk with your doctor about whether the flu shot or nasal spray is right for you.

The flu shot will not give you the flu. You cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Although some people may become sick with flu-like symptoms after getting a flu vaccination, they probably were infected with a different virus. Or they were infected with the flu virus before the flu shot took effect, which usually takes up to two weeks to provide the most protection. The most common side effect of the shot is soreness at the injection site, which resolves within two days.

Flu shots are especially important for pregnant women. Flu is more likely to be severe for pregnant women than for those who are not pregnant. Changes in the immune

system, heart, and lungs during pregnancy make pregnant women more prone to severe illness. Expectant moms with flu also have a greater risk for serious problems for their unborn baby, including premature labor and delivery.

A mother's flu vaccine also can help protect the baby who can't be vaccinated against the flu until he or she is six months old. Nasal-spray flu vaccine is not recommended for expectant moms.

You need more than hand washing to prevent the flu. Even though hand washing and avoiding people who are sick are good habits, they are not enough to prevent the flu. Flu viruses spread through the air when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. The viruses can reach the mouths or noses of people nearby, causing them to get the flu. You can infect others a day before you have symptoms and up to five to seven days after you become sick. Vaccination is the strongest tool to prevent the flu.

It's never too late to get vaccinated during flu season. Flu season can last from October until May. Usually, the disease peaks in January. For protection through the entire flu season, you should get vaccinated as soon as vaccine is available in the fall. But you can get vaccinated until April or May. If you plan to travel abroad, be sure to ask about flu vaccine.



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