

Common Myths About Flu and the Flu Shot

Every year people get the flu (influenza), an illness which can easily be prevented by getting the flu shot. But some people do not get a flu shot because of “myths” or ideas which are not true. By learning the facts about the flu shot and getting vaccinated each year, you can keep yourself from getting the flu.

MYTH

“The flu isn’t a serious disease.”

FACTS

Flu is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. Most who die are 65 years and older. But small children less than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu. The H1N1 flu is especially serious for children, young adults, and pregnant women.

MYTH

“The flu shot can cause the flu.”

FACTS

The flu shot cannot cause the flu. Some people get a little soreness or redness where they get the shot. It goes away in a day or two. Serious problems from the flu shot are very rare.

MYTH

“The flu shot does not work.”

FACTS

Most of the time the flu shot will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot has ranged from 70% to 90% when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. Getting the vaccine is your best protection against this disease.

MYTH

“The side effects are worse than the flu.”

FACTS

The worst side effect you’re likely to get from a flu shot is a sore arm. The nasal mist flu vaccine might cause nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, and cough. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than 1 in 4 million.

MYTH

“Only older people need a flu shot.”

FACTS

ALL people 6 months or older should get a flu shot. It’s especially important for adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease to get a flu shot.

MYTH

“You must get the flu vaccine before December.”

FACTS

Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. The best time to get vaccinated is October or November (or even earlier if the vaccine is available). But you can get vaccinated in December or later.

—Please continue to the next page for more **FLU MYTHS and FACTS**—

Common Myths About Flu and the Flu Shot

MYTH

“I got vaccinated last year so I don’t need a flu shot this year.”

FACTS

Influenza viruses change every year and so does the flu vaccine. Even if you got vaccinated last year, you may not be protected against this year’s flu. Also, the effects of the flu vaccine go away over time, so last year’s flu shot won’t help you this year.

MYTH

“People with asthma shouldn’t get the flu shot.”

FACTS

People with asthma are at high risk of getting very sick from the flu. The flu shot will NOT cause an asthma attack.

Respiratory infections like the flu are more serious in patients with asthma, and the flu can often cause pneumonia and an asthma attack. It is very important for all people with asthma to get the flu shot every year. But, people with asthma should get the flu SHOT and not the nasal mist flu vaccine.

MYTH

“I can’t get my flu shot today because I am sick.”

FACTS

You can get a flu shot at the same time you have a fever (as long as it’s not very high) or if you have a mild respiratory illness (like a cold). But if you are very sick, you may need to get your flu shot at another time.

MYTH

“Vitamin C and echinacea will help prevent the flu.”

FACTS

Vitamin C and echinacea won’t prevent the flu. Echinacea might modestly help symptoms of the flu...AFTER you are already sick.

This patient handout was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control poster, “Flu Vaccine Facts and Myths.” More information about the flu is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>.

[August 2010]