

Protect Your Family from the Flu

What is the flu?

Influenza (flu) is a common illness caused by a virus that infects the respiratory tract. Every year in the United States, up to 1 in 5 people get the flu. School-aged children are up to 4 times more likely to be infected with the flu than adults.

How does the flu spread?

The flu is usually spread from person to person through droplets from a sick person's cough or sneeze. It can also spread by touching a surface or an object that has flu virus on it (such as a doorknob), and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

What are the signs and symptoms of the flu?

- Cough
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness

Some people may also experience fever and stomach problems.

How serious is the flu?

The flu can be very serious, especially for young children and those with chronic illnesses like diabetes, asthma, or heart disease. Every year in Los Angeles County, children are hospitalized because of flu-related complications, and some of them even die. Children and adults with the flu may also experience:

- Sinus problems and ear infections
- Pneumonia
- Dehydration
- Worsening of illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, and heart problems

When should you seek emergency medical care?

Call 9-1-1 immediately if your infant or child experiences:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Fever with a rash
- Irritability
- Being unable to eat
- Dehydration (not drinking fluids, fewer wet diapers, or no tears when crying)
- Return of fever and worse cough after symptoms have improved

How can the flu be prevented?

The best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated every year. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine. Since flu viruses change every year, the flu vaccine is updated to protect against the most common viruses. That's why a yearly vaccine is needed.



Who should get vaccinated?

Everyone 6 months of age and older, including healthy children and adults!

Especially if you are:

- 6 months through 18 years old
- 50 years and older
- Pregnant or just had a baby
- Morbidly obese
- Living in a nursing or long-term care home
- Living with a weakened immune system or chronic medical condition (diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease)
- Living with or caring for someone who is more likely to have flu complications
- A healthcare provider

Prevention Tips

- Get vaccinated every year
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water
- Stay home if you're sick

When is the best time of year to get a flu vaccine?

You and your children should get a flu vaccine as soon as it's available, so you're protected before the flu season starts. However, vaccination is recommended throughout the entire flu season (from October through April).

Why are flu vaccines safe?

Flu vaccines are safe, effective, and don't cause the flu. Most people have only mild side effects, like a low fever or a sore arm. The risk of a more serious reaction is far less than the risk of serious flu complications.

Should my child get a flu shot or nasal spray?

There are 2 kinds of flu vaccines. Both are safe and very effective.

The flu shot is an inactivated vaccine made with a killed virus. It's given with a needle in the arm or thigh. The flu shot can be given to people over 6 months of age, including healthy people, pregnant women, and those with chronic medical conditions.

The nasal spray flu vaccine is made with live, weakened flu viruses that **don't** cause the flu. It's called LAIV, for live attenuated influenza vaccine. LAIV can be given to healthy people 2 through 49 years of age and women who aren't pregnant.

Who shouldn't get the flu vaccine?

If you're severely allergic to chicken eggs, have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine, or if you're under 6 months of age, you shouldn't get the flu vaccine. Also, if you're moderately or severely ill and/or have a high fever, your doctor may tell you to wait before getting your vaccine.

Where can my family get vaccinated?

Flu vaccines are available at doctors' offices, community health centers, pharmacies, community sites, and public health clinics. Most health plans, including Medicare and Medi-Cal, cover flu vaccines.

Some children can get vaccines at no charge through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program at their regular doctor's office or clinic. If your children don't have insurance coverage for flu vaccines, ask their health care provider if they qualify for the VFC program.

If you don't have health insurance or a regular doctor or your doctor doesn't offer flu vaccines, dial 2-1-1 for a list of low-cost immunization clinics.



Additional Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org/healthtopics/immunizations.cfm

California Department of Public Health Immunization Branch
www.getimmunizedca.org

California Immunization Coalition
www.immunizeca.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/flu

LA County Department of Public Health Immunization Program
www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip

Your healthcare provider will let you know if your child needs more than one dose of vaccine.

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