

Influenza Vaccine (Inactivated): What you need to know

1. Why get vaccinated?

Influenza (“flu”) is a contagious disease.

It is caused by the influenza virus, which can be spread by coughing, sneezing, or nasal secretions.

Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, symptoms last only a few days. They include:

- fever/chills
- sore throat
- muscle aches
- fatigue
- cough
- headache
- runny or stuffy nose

Other illnesses can have the same symptoms and are often mistaken for influenza.

Young children, people 65 and older, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions—such as heart, lung or kidney disease, or a weakened immune system—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 influenza and even more require hospitalization.

By getting flu vaccine you can protect yourself from influenza and may also avoid spreading influenza to others.

2. Inactivated influenza vaccine

There are two types of influenza vaccine:

1. **Inactivated** (killed) vaccine, the “flu shot,” is given by injection with a needle.
2. **Live, attenuated** (weakened) influenza vaccine is sprayed into the nostrils.

A “high-dose” inactivated influenza vaccine is available for people 65 years of age and older. Ask your doctor for more information.

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. Flu vaccine will not prevent disease from other viruses, including flu viruses not contained in the vaccine.

It takes up to 2 weeks for protection to develop after the shot. Protection lasts about a year.

3. Who should get inactivated influenza vaccine and when?

WHO

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 healthcare personnel and close contacts of children younger than 6 months.

WHEN

Get the vaccine as soon as it is available. This should provide protection if the flu season comes early. You can get the vaccine as long as illness is occurring in your community.

Influenza can occur at any time, but most influenza occurs from October through May. In recent seasons, most infections have occurred in January and February. Getting vaccinated in December, or even later, will still be beneficial in most years.

Adults and older children need one dose of influenza vaccine each year.

Influenza vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines, including pneumococcal vaccine.

4. Some people should not get inactivated influenza vaccine or should wait.

- Tell your doctor if you have any severe (life-threatening) allergies, including a severe allergy to eggs. A severe allergy to any vaccine component may be a reason not to get the vaccine. Allergic reactions to influenza vaccine are rare.
- Tell your doctor if you ever had a severe reaction after a dose of influenza vaccine.
- Tell your doctor if you ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralytic illness, also called GBS).
- People who are moderately or severely ill should usually wait until they recover before getting flu vaccine. If you are ill, talk to your doctor about whether to reschedule the vaccination. People with a mild illness can usually get the vaccine.

5. What are the risks from inactivated influenza 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 small.

Serious problems from inactivated influenza vaccine are very rare. The viruses in inactivated influenza vaccine have been killed, so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.

Mild problems

- soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- hoarseness; sore, red or itchy eyes; cough
- fever
- aches
- headache
- itching
- fatigue

If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and last 1–2 days.

Moderate problems

Young children who get inactivated flu vaccine and pneumococcal vaccine (PCV13) at the same time appear to be at increased risk for seizures caused by fever.

Severe problems

- 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.

6. What if there is a serious reaction?

What should I look for?

- Look for anything that concerns you, such as signs of a severe allergic reaction, very high fever, or behavior changes.

Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness. These would start a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.