Breaking the Myths about the FLU VACCINE

Get the FLU SHOT FACTS

URGENT CARE when you can't wait.
The flu is a highly contagious respiratory illness that’s caused by the influenza virus, which infects roughly 62 million Americans every year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average of 13 percent of the U.S. population contracts the flu virus annually. However, that number is presumed to be far higher as the findings are based only on confirmed cases.

Each year, hospitals and doctor offices are flooded with patients reporting flu symptoms, which can range in severity and sometimes lead to death.

This results in the average annual healthcare costs for flu-related outpatient doctor visits and hospitalizations to exceed over $10 billion. While the CDC recommends anyone over the age of 6 months receives the flu vaccination, on average, only 40 percent of adults in the United States receive the vaccination each year.

Pharmacies hold big expectations for a high volume of people to receive the vaccine as the CDC reports the vaccine can reduce the risk for contracting the flu by as much as 50-60 percent. However, less than half of Americans will get vaccinated each year. According to a survey by Walgreens, the low vaccination numbers result in 100 million lost work days, nearly $7 million in lost wages, and more than 32 million missed school days each year due to influenza.

These numbers could be drastically lower if more of the population received the flu shot; however, only 49 percent of children 6 months to 17 years old, 31 percent of adults 18-49 years old, and 45 percent of adults 50-64 years old received the vaccine within the last 12 months. But, 70 percent of adults 65 or older have received the vaccine, which is likely due to the risk for serious complications for the elderly who do contract influenza.

While handwashing and reducing contact with public places can decrease the likeliness of contracting the flu, the only way to prevent the flu is with the influenza vaccine.

Despite the wide availability of the flu vaccine, many remain hesitant to receive it due to myths and false facts about the flu and the vaccine.
Interesting Facts about the Flu

The true number of flu cases in the United States remains unconfirmed due to the misconception surrounding the symptoms of the flu. Since some people experience more severe symptoms than others, not all of those infected with influenza seek treatment. And, with 20 to 30 percent of people carrying the virus having no symptoms, they don’t know they are infected.

For those who do have symptoms, the symptoms can take many forms, such as fever, chills, and muscle and body aches, including headaches. Often, symptoms include coughing and sore throat that are accompanied by a runny or stuffy nose, and there’s generally an overall sense of fatigue. While many believe the flu must include vomiting and diarrhea, this usually only occurs in children. In addition, the virus may cause a secondary bacterial infection that requires antibiotics and will lengthen the duration of recovery.

Many try to shorten the duration of the virus at home; however, this just isn’t possible. Over-the-counter regimens, chicken soup, and “starving the fever” will not quicken the recovery. Myths such as these are the very reason many choose not to become vaccinated.

As vaccinations remain the center of controversy, whether for the flu or childhood immunizations, breaking the myths surrounding the flu shot is the only way to educate the public to the benefits of the vaccine. The more people who understand flu shot facts, the more lives that will be saved each year from influenza.
Myth: You can get sick from the vaccine.

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, fear of becoming ill from the vaccine is the top reason people choose not to become vaccinated. However, since flu shots don’t contain the live flu virus, it’s impossible to contract influenza from the vaccine.

While some people do become ill after receiving the vaccine, it’s not due to the vaccine itself. It can take up to two weeks for the vaccine to begin protecting the body from the virus. Those who do become ill after receiving the vaccine came into contact with the virus prior to the vaccine becoming effective.
Myth: The flu vaccine isn’t safe.

The second most common reason people don’t receive the flu shot is due to the belief it’s unsafe, especially in the case of the H1N1 vaccine. This couldn’t be further from the truth. All vaccines undergo years of safety testing prior to gaining the FDA’s approval. However, as with any medications, there can be some mild side effects.

The most common side effects include swelling, soreness, and redness at the injection site, which generally lasts less than 2 days. This is a result of the body’s early immune response reacting to a foreign substance entering the body. In some instances, other reactions can include low grade fevers and aches, which can begin with 1-2 days after the injection but will subside quickly.
Myth: The flu is just a bad cold, so I don’t need a vaccine.

Many healthy people believe they don’t need a vaccine because they are healthy enough to fight off the illness with handwashing and avoiding public places. Adding to the misconception, many believe the flu is just a bad cold, so it’s not dangerous.

Although the flu does cause cold-like symptoms, the severity of flu symptoms are far more severe. In fact, the flu is responsible for more than 36,000 deaths and 200,000 hospitalizations each year in the U.S., which could be avoided with the flu vaccine.
Myth: It’s too late to get the vaccine.

Despite what many people believe, it’s never too late to become vaccinated because the vaccines are still beneficial as long as the flu virus is circulating.

While many choose to get vaccinated as early as October, getting the vaccine in late December will still offer protection during the peak of the flu season in January and February. Since the virus can still circulate as late as May, getting the vaccine at any time is still beneficial.

For those who received the vaccine early, it will remain effective throughout flu season because the vaccine lasts a full year.
Myth: The vaccine is ineffective.

There is some truth to this myth. The effectiveness of the vaccine varies for individuals, as well as the strains of flu viruses circulating in any given year. For example, in 2014-2015, it’s estimated the effectiveness was under 20 percent; however, that was due to a new strain of the flu virus, the H1N1, which caused the largest flu outbreak in over 40 years. This pandemic resulted in more than 12,000 flu-related deaths in the U.S., but now the trivalent vaccines include H1N1, increasing the vaccines’ effectiveness.

Despite the setback in 2014 with the H1N1 strain, from 2010-2012, there were 74 percent fewer flu-related pediatric intensive care unit admissions due to flu vaccinations. In addition, there was a 71 percent reduction in flu-related hospitalizations among adults of all ages, and a 77 percent reduction among adults 50 and older during the 2011-2012 flu season.

For those with a high likeliness for contracting the flu, like those with a compromised immune system, the vaccine reduced hospitalizations for those with diabetes by 79 percent and those with chronic lung disease by 52 percent. For pregnant women who receive the vaccine, it’s 92 percent effective in preventing the hospitalization of infants after birth for up to 6 months.
Myth: The nasal vaccine makes you sick.

Despite what many believe, the nasal vaccine cannot give you the flu.

While the nasal vaccine does contain the active virus, the virus is weakened and designed to only cause a mild infection at cooler temperatures within the nose. This will not infect the lungs or other areas of the body; however, side effects can include runny nose, nasal congestion, and cough, which are generally mild.

Children 2-17 years of age are most likely to experience side effects of the nasal vaccine, which are mild and short-lasting when compared to the flu itself.
Myth: You get the flu from being cold.

Being out in cold weather, having wet hair outside, or wearing wet clothing will not increase your chance for contracting the flu. However, as the temperature drops, the virus does begin to circulate more, making it more common to spread during colder months.

Influenza is mainly spread by droplets of bodily fluids from an infected person while coughing, sneezing, and talking, which land in the mouths and noses of people who are nearby. Less commonly, touching surfaces that have the flu virus on it will also cause the infection.

As soon as the first day before symptoms develop, a person may be contagious, as well as up to 5 to 7 days after becoming ill. However, young children may be able to infect others long after being ill due to weaker immune systems.
Myth: The flu is safer than the vaccine.

With controversy surrounding vaccines, many have come to believe it’s better to get the flu than the vaccine.

The flu is serious, especially among young children, older adults, and those with certain chronic illnesses like asthma, heart disease, and diabetes.

The flu virus can lead to hospitalizations and death, whereas the vaccine won’t.
Flu Shots Save Lives

With flu-related deaths in the U.S. from 1976 to 2007 ranging as low as 3,000 to as high as 49,000, between 80-90 percent of flu-related deaths will occur in people older than 65. In addition, 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized and 140 flu-related pediatric deaths occur each year. Children under 2 years old have the highest risk for developing severe flu complications. As a result, the CDC recommends everyone over the age of 6 months is vaccinated.

Traditional flu vaccines (trivalent vaccines) protect against three strains of the flu virus, while quadrivalent vaccines protect against four strains. Trivalent flu vaccines protects against two influenza A viruses, H1N1 and H3N3, as well as an influenza B virus. The Standard-dose trivalent shots are approved for children as young as 6 months and adults up to 64 years of age. For adults over 65, a high-dose trivalent shot is recommended. Additional options include a trivalent shot containing the virus grown in cell culture for people 18 and older or a recombinant trivalent shot that’s egg-free for people 18 or older.

The quadrivalent flu shot can be given to all age groups, including children as young as 6 months. The intradermal quadrivalent shot is injected into the skin instead of the muscle using a smaller needle for people 18-64 years old.

A quadrivalent nasal spray vaccine is also available and approved for people 2 through 49 years old. Since it contains a weakened form of the virus, pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions shouldn’t get the nasal vaccine.

For each vaccine, it takes about two weeks for the vaccine to become effective because the antibodies must develop in the body to begin protecting against the virus. Its recommended flu vaccines are given by October; however, by getting the vaccine later, people are still protected as long as the flu is circulating.

Since the influenza virus mutates each year, the vaccine is updated annually to protect against the current mutations that are likely to cause an outbreak. Therefore, it’s important to get a flu vaccine each year to stay protected from the potentially devastating effects of influenza.
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