

INFORMATION ON FLU SHOTS

*Protect Yourself
Against the Flu*

This information from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is for Veterans and their families. VA and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that everyone get a flu shot every year. This fact sheet answers some questions you may have about the flu shot.

**GET THE FLU SHOT EACH YEAR.
IT'S SAFE, AND IT WORKS!**

➔ Why should I get a flu shot?

Getting a flu shot is the best way to slow the spread of the flu. The flu shot can protect you against the flu.

➔ Who should get a flu shot?

All people age 6 months and older who want to reduce their risk of getting sick should get a flu shot. People more at risk of illness from the flu include:

- People with other health problems, like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease;
- People older than 50;
- Women who are pregnant or want to become pregnant;
- People caring for an infant or a family member with health problems; and
- Health Care Personnel.

➔ How well does the flu shot work?

Studies have shown that getting the flu shot can reduce illness and death related to the flu.

➔ When should I get a flu shot?

Get a flu shot as soon as it becomes available in the Fall so that you are protected all Winter. You will need to get a new flu shot every year to protect yourself from the most recent flu viruses.

➔ How does the flu shot protect me?

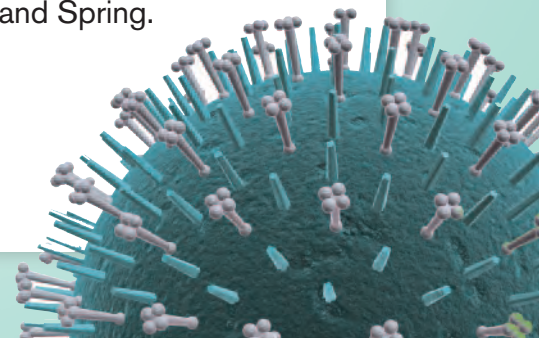
The flu shot helps your body build antibodies to fight flu viruses. These can help prevent you from getting sick with the flu. Once you get the flu shot, it takes about 2 weeks for your body to make enough antibodies to protect you.

➔ Why do I need a new flu shot every year?

Flu viruses can change over time. Every year, the flu shot is updated to contain the flu viruses most likely to spread that year.

➔ FAST FACTS: WHAT IS THE FLU?

- The flu—short for influenza—is a respiratory illness caused by different viruses.
- The flu spreads easily. It occurs every year during Fall, Winter, and Spring.
- The flu is different from a cold. People with the flu usually feel achy and have a fever.
- Every year in the U.S., the flu causes over 226,000 hospitalizations and about 36,000 deaths.



➔ What is in the flu shot?

Every year the flu shot is made of three strains of non-living flu virus. Experts decide which strains will be in the flu shot based on the flu viruses that are spreading that year.

Sometimes the viruses change after the flu shot is made. Even if this happens, you will still get some protection from the flu shot.

➔ Can I get the flu from the flu shot?

No. The viruses in the shot are not alive, so you cannot get the flu from the flu shot.

➔ Can I still get the flu after I get a flu shot?

Sometimes this can happen if:

- The flu shot does not contain the flu virus that is spreading.
- You are exposed to the flu before or right after getting the flu shot. You may still get the flu before the shot takes effect.
- You have a weak immune system or other illness that takes you longer to make antibodies.
- Your body fails to make antibodies after getting a flu shot.

➔ Is the flu shot safe?

Yes, the flu shot is safe. Most people who get the flu shot have no serious side effects or allergic reactions to it. Some people may have redness or swelling on their arm where the shot was given. A very small number of people may get minor body aches, a headache, or a low-grade fever that lasts only a day or two.

WHAT IS THE HIGH-DOSE FLU SHOT?

The high-dose flu shot was approved by the Federal Government in 2010. It can only be given to people age 65 and older. It has the same three strains of flu viruses as the standard dose flu shot, but with higher doses of each. Early studies show that the high-dose flu shot can help to build more antibodies to fight against the flu. Some people have had more discomfort at the site of the high-dose flu shot than with the standard dose flu shot. Studies are being done to learn more about the high-dose flu shot.



➔ I am allergic to eggs. What should I do?

If you have a severe allergy to chicken eggs, talk with your health care provider before getting the flu shot.

➔ What else can I do to slow the spread of the flu?

- Avoid people who are sick
- Clean hands often
- Keep hands away from face
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Stay home when sick

➔ Where can I find more information?

Main U.S. Federal Web sites are www.flu.gov and www.cdc.gov/flu

VA flu information is available at www.publichealth.va.gov/flu



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