

Influenza

What is influenza (also called flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

Signs and symptoms of flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

**It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

Preventing seasonal flu: Get vaccinated

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season. There are two types of flu vaccines:

- "Flu shots" — inactivated vaccines (containing killed virus) that are given with a needle.
- The nasal-spray flu vaccine — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that is given as a nasal spray (sometimes called LAIV for "Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine"). The viruses in the nasal spray vaccine do not cause the flu. LAIV is approved for use in healthy people 2 to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against flu-like illnesses caused by non-influenza viruses.

When to get vaccinated against seasonal flu

Yearly flu vaccination should begin in September, or as soon as vaccine is available, and continue throughout the flu season which can last as late as May. This is because the timing and duration of flu seasons vary. While flu season can begin early as October, most of the time seasonal flu activity peaks in January, February or later.

For information on who should receive a flu vaccine visit:
<http://www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/2010/r100224.htm>

