When patients complain of aches, sneezing, sore throat and exhaustion that means flu season is here. And it will hit hard, if it is anything like the last flu season in which there were nearly 43 million cases of influenza, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). But there is a way to protect your patients and their families this season: Encourage them to get a flu shot. Here are some questions that your patients might have about the flu vaccine and how you can respond.

What should I do to protect myself from flu this season?

The CDC recommends annual flu vaccination for everyone over the age of 6 months who do not have contraindications. This is the first and most important step in protecting against influenza. There are also everyday preventive actions patients can take such as washing their hands to reduce the spread of germs. And if they have the flu, patients should stay home from work or school to prevent spreading the virus to others.

If I’m healthy, do I need the flu vaccine?

The flu is a contagious disease that can lead to other serious illnesses such as pneumonia. Even if a patient believes she is healthy and “doesn’t ever get sick,” they can still spread the infection to those at high risk and miss work or school for a significant amount of time. Getting vaccinated can save them from lost time at work and feeling ill.

I feel a cold coming on. Should I get the flu vaccine?
Patients can still receive the flu shot if they are sick with a cold or other mild illness and do not have a fever. If the symptoms are severe and the patient has a fever, then the patient should wait to get the vaccine until they are feeling better.

**Can I get the flu shot if I am allergic to eggs?**

According to the CDC, patients with a history of egg allergy of any severity should still receive any licensed, recommended and age-appropriate flu vaccine. Patients with a severe allergic reaction to eggs should be vaccinated in an inpatient or outpatient medical setting under the supervision of a health professional who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions.

**Will the vaccine give me the flu?**

While there can be some side effects, such as swelling or redness from the shot, muscle aches, fever and nausea, it should not be mistaken for influenza. The flu vaccine will not give patients influenza, but they can still catch a nonflu virus or even the flu since it takes two weeks for the protective effects of the vaccination to kick in. It is also possible to be exposed to an influenza virus that differs from what’s included in this season’s vaccine.

**If I got vaccinated last year, do I still need a flu shot?**

Influenza viruses change all the time. Each season, influenza vaccines are updated for the best possible protection against the virus strains that experts predict will circulate widely during flu season. Protection from last year’s vaccine will fade with time. Getting a flu vaccine every year is the best protection against influenza.

**What should I do to protect my loved ones from the flu this season?**

Patients should encourage their loved ones to get vaccinated, especially those who are at high risk of developing flu complications. If a loved one who is at high risk develops the flu, patients should encourage them to seek medical attention immediately.
Do some children require two doses of flu vaccine?

Some children between 6 months and 8 years of age will need two doses of the flu vaccine this season, according to the CDC. Children in this age group who have not previously received two or more total doses before July 1, 2019, or whose vaccination history is unknown, will need two doses of the flu vaccine administered at least four weeks apart.

What can I do to protect children who are too young to get vaccinated?

Children younger than 6 months old are at high risk of serious flu complications and are too young to receive the vaccine. If your patient lives with or cares for an infant younger than 6 months old, encourage them to get the flu vaccine to help protect them from influenza. The CDC also recommends that anyone else who will be around the baby should also be vaccinated for further protection.