

Influenza (Flu) FAQs: Older Adults



1. What is flu?

Flu is an illness that spreads easily from person to person. It is caused by a virus that affects the nose, throat, and lungs. Some people with flu may have mild illnesses, but others may be very sick and need to be hospitalized. In rare cases, flu can cause death.

2. How does flu spread?

Flu spreads when sick people cough, sneeze, or talk. These virus-containing droplets can be inhaled by people nearby or land on their eyes, nose, or mouth, leading to infection. Respiratory droplets containing the virus can reach the mouth, nose or eyes of others and cause infection. The droplets are too small to see. People can spread flu before they feel sick or even if they never feel sick.

Flu can also spread when someone touches a surface with the virus and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes.

3. What are common flu symptoms?

People with flu may have:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat
- Body or muscle aches
- Lack of energy
- Trouble breathing

Some people with flu do not have a fever. Some people do not have any symptoms but can still spread flu to others.

4. Who can get very sick from flu?

Some people are at higher risk of developing severe flu complications if they get sick, including people 65 and older, patients who are pregnant, young children, and people with underlying medical conditions, like lung disease, diabetes, or heart disease and people with weakened immune systems. Getting a flu vaccination every year is especially important for these groups of people.



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5. How can I protect myself from flu?

The best way to stay safe is to get a flu shot every year. Other ways to help stop flu include:

- Staying away from sick people
- Covering your coughs and sneezes
- Washing your hands often
- Keeping air clean and fresh indoors
- Encouraging family members, caregivers, and other close contacts to get a flu vaccine to help reduce your chance of being exposed to flu.

Ask your doctor about other steps you can take to help stay healthy.

6. Who is recommended to get a flu vaccine?

An annual flu vaccine is recommended for those 6 months and older. There are very few exceptions. Flu vaccination is especially important for adults aged 65 years and older because they are at higher risk for serious complications from flu, including hospitalization and death. Higher dose flu vaccines (high-dose inactivated and recombinant), adjuvanted inactivated flu vaccine, and the mRNA flu vaccine are preferred for people 65 years and older.

If these vaccines are not available, adults age 65 and older should get a standard-dose vaccine instead. People age 65 years and older should not get a nasal spray flu vaccine.

7. Do flu vaccines work?

Yes. Flu vaccines help stop many people from getting very sick every year. Flu vaccines also help:

- Keep people out of the hospital
- Make flu less serious if you still get sick
- Lower the chance of doctor visits because of flu

8. When should I get a flu vaccine?

Most people should get a flu vaccine in September or October. It is best to get the vaccine by the end of October, but getting a flu vaccine later is still helpful if the virus is circulating. Flu can spread through winter and even into spring. Talk with your doctor about the best time to get vaccinated.



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9. Can a flu vaccine give me flu?

No. Flu vaccine cannot give you flu. Flu vaccines contain inactivated (killed) or weakened influenza viruses that cannot cause flu-related illness.

10. Do flu vaccines have side effects?

Some people may have mild side effects that can feel like flu, such as:

- A sore arm
- Headache
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Feeling tired
- Runny nose or cough

These side effects are normal and usually go away in a few days.

11. If I already had flu this season, should I still get a vaccine?

Yes. Getting a vaccine after having flu helps provide additional protection. Flu vaccines cover multiple strains. Despite having an illness from one strain, you are still at risk of getting sick from other strains.

12. Can I get a flu shot and other vaccines at the same time?

Yes. Most vaccines can be given at the same visit. Talk with your doctor to see what is right for you.

13. Is there treatment if I do get flu?

Yes. Call your doctor if you think you may have flu. Taking this step is especially important for adults aged 65 years and older because they are at higher risk for complications. Your doctor may recommend antiviral medicine, which works best when started soon after symptoms begin.

