

What is influenza?

Influenza is an infection of the lungs and airways caused by a virus. Various strains of influenza virus circulate throughout the world each year. In North America, influenza usually affects people between November and April.

The influenza virus often changes slightly. Most people who have had influenza will have some protection against the changed virus. However, 3 to 4 times each century the influenza virus changes in a major way. People will not have any protection against it and the virus will spread rapidly around the world. This global epidemic (pandemic) can cause serious illness and death.

I'm Healthy why do I need the flu vaccine?

The influenza shot is the most effective and longest lasting protection against the influenza virus and the illness it can cause.

In addition to the usual five to ten days of serious illness, it can take weeks to fully recover, interrupting work, recreation and family activities.

Further, as more people are vaccinated, the influenza virus has less chance to multiply and circulate. Protecting yourself can also benefit those around you who may be at risk of severe complications from influenza. However, the vaccine is provided free of charge to only those who have a high risk of complications of influenza (see previous question).

How long does it take for the vaccine to work?

Maximum protection develops by about 2 weeks after vaccination and lasts up to a year.

How effective is the vaccine?

Influenza vaccination has been shown to prevent illness in approximately 70-90% of healthy children and adults. Some vaccinated people might still get influenza, but usually experience mild symptoms. You might also get another strain of influenza that the vaccine was not designed to protect against.

Are there side effects from the vaccine?

Influenza vaccine is very safe, but like any medication, side effects can occur. Most people who get the vaccine have either no side effects or mild effects such as soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given. Some people may get a fever or muscle aches that start shortly after vaccination and may last 1-2 days. If you experience red eyes, a cough or difficulty breathing within 2-24 hours call your doctor. Severe allergic reactions are extremely rare. If they do occur it is within a few minutes to a few hours after vaccination.

Can I get influenza from the vaccine?

No. Influenza vaccine cannot cause influenza because it is made from killed viruses. People who think they got influenza from the vaccine could be confusing their symptoms with those of another virus, or an allergy.

Who should not be immunized?

- People who are severely allergic to eggs, because eggs are used to make vaccine.
- People who have severe allergies to any part of the vaccine.
- People who have had a severe reaction to a previous influenza vaccine.
- Children under 6 months of age.
- People who are ill with fever (They can be immunized after symptoms improve).