Why should people get vaccinated against the flu?

Influenza is a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death. Every flu season is different, and influenza infection can affect people differently, but millions of people get the flu every year, hundreds of thousands of people are hospitalized and thousands or tens of thousands of people die from flu-related causes every year.

How do flu vaccines work?

Flu vaccines, made from inactivated flu viruses, cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against flu infection.

Who should get vaccinated this season?

Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every season. This recommendation has been in place since February 24, 2010 when CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted for “universal” flu vaccination in the United States to expand protection against the flu to more people.

When should I get vaccinated?

Flu vaccination should begin soon after vaccine becomes available, by the end of October, if possible. However, as long as flu viruses are circulating, vaccination can be given throughout the flu season, even in January or later.

Who should NOT get the flu vaccine?

People with severe, life-threatening allergies to flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine must not get the flu shot. People with a mild to moderate allergy to eggs or any of the ingredients in the vaccine, people with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralyzing illness, also called GBS) or people who are not feeling well, should talk to your medical provider before receiving the influenza vaccine.

Why do I need a flu vaccine every year?

A flu vaccine is needed every season for two reasons. First, the body’s immune response from vaccination declines over time, so an annual vaccine is needed for optimal protection. Second, because flu viruses are constantly changing, the formulation of the flu vaccine is reviewed each year and sometimes updated to keep up with changing flu viruses. For the best protection, everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated annually.
Does flu vaccine work right away?
No. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection.

Can I get seasonal flu even though I got a flu vaccine this year?
Yes. There is still a possibility you could get the flu even if you got vaccinated. The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on various factors, including the age and health status of the person being vaccinated, and also the similarity or “match” between the viruses used to make the vaccine and those circulating in the community. If the viruses in the vaccine and the influenza viruses circulating in the community are closely matched, vaccine effectiveness is higher.

What are the benefits of flu vaccination?
- Flu vaccination can keep you from getting sick with flu.
- Flu vaccination can reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalization, including among children and older adults.
- Flu vaccination is an important preventive tool for people with chronic health conditions.
- Vaccination helps protect women during and after pregnancy. Getting vaccinated can also protect a baby after birth from flu. (Mom passes antibodies onto the developing baby during her pregnancy.)
- Flu vaccination also may make your illness milder if you do get sick.
- Getting vaccinated yourself also protects people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions.

Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?
No, a flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. Flu vaccines that are administered with a needle are currently made in two ways: the vaccine is made either with a) flu vaccine viruses that have been ‘inactivated’ and are therefore not infectious, or b) with no flu vaccine viruses at all (which is the case for recombinant influenza vaccine).

The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that may occur are:
- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever (low grade)
- Aches

However, on rare occasions, flu vaccination can cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions.
Special Consideration Regarding Egg Allergy

People with egg allergies can receive any licensed, recommended age-appropriate influenza vaccine and no longer have to be monitored for 30 minutes after receiving the vaccine. People who have severe egg allergies should be vaccinated in a medical setting and be supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions.