

FLU MYTHBUSTERS

Everyone knows someone who needs to be immunized against influenza this year. In fact, it is likely that you or someone in your family fall into one of the groups that health care officials recommend should receive an influenza immunization. Many misconceptions about the influenza virus and influenza vaccine persist, despite widespread impact of the disease and benefits of the vaccine.

Here are some common myths and facts about influenza “flu”;

1. **MYTH:** Influenza is no more than a nuisance, much like the common cold, that cannot be prevented.
FACT: Influenza, commonly referred to as the “flu,” is a severe and sometimes life-threatening disease. Influenza and its related complications cause an average of 36,000 deaths and approximately 226,000 hospitalizations in the U.S. each year. You can avoid getting influenza by getting vaccinated each year.
2. **MYTH:** You can get influenza from a flu shot.
FACT: The flu shot does not contain any of the live viruses, so it is impossible to get influenza from the vaccine. Side effects may occur in some people, such as mild soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site, headache or low-grade fever.
Vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent influenza and its complications.
3. **MYTH:** Only the elderly are at risk for developing serious complications from the influenza virus.
FACT: Influenza impacts people of all ages. Each year, more than 226,000 Americans are hospitalized and about 36,000 die from influenza-related complications.
In fact, in the past three influenza seasons, an average of 60 children have died each year from influenza.
4. **MYTH:** I missed the chance to get an influenza vaccination in the fall, so now I have to wait until next year.
FACT: Annual immunization is the best way to protect against influenza. Get vaccinated as soon as possible, whenever that is during the influenza season.
Vaccination typically begins in October and can continue through March. In most seasons, influenza virus activity doesn’t peak until February or March.
5. **MYTH:** It is not necessary to get immunized against influenza every year because protection lasts from previous vaccinations.
FACT: The types of influenza viruses circulating in the community change from year to year. Because of this, a new vaccine is made each year to protect against the current strains.
Also, immunity to influenza viruses only lasts for a year, so it is important to get vaccinated against influenza every year.
6. **MYTH:** People shouldn’t be immunized against influenza if they are sick.
FACT: Minor illnesses with or without fever should not prevent vaccination, especially in children with mild upper respiratory infections (cold) or upper respiratory allergies. In addition, people with chronic illnesses, such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease, have a higher risk for contracting the influenza virus and for developing complications. These individuals should be immunized each year. Individuals with severe allergies to eggs or those who have had a previous vaccine-associated allergic reaction should avoid immunization.

7. **MYTH:** I seem to get the stomach flu each year. My friend told me the influenza vaccine might prevent the stomach flu next year.
FACT: Unlike most other common respiratory and stomach infections that are often referred to as “the flu,” influenza can cause more severe illness and can result in complications leading to hospitalization and death, especially among the elderly.
Common symptoms of influenza infection include a high fever (101°F - 102°F) that begins suddenly, sore throat, chills, cough, headache and muscle aches.
The influenza vaccine protects you against the influenza virus but not against viral gastroenteritis, which is the correct term to use when referring to the “stomach flu.”
8. **MYTH:** The flu changes every year, so getting a flu shot will not protect me from getting sick.
FACT: Influenza is unpredictable and viruses change throughout the year. Getting vaccinated annually is the best way to protect against influenza. The vaccine will often offer some protection against a different, but related, strain that may begin to circulate in the community. This could mean milder illness or prevention of complications.

Please protect yourself and those you love from influenza.

Get your flu shot.

Terri Kramolis