The best way to avoid the flu or keep it from being severe is to get the flu vaccine each year. Even healthy individuals can get the flu, and it is dangerous.

Some individuals are not sure if the flu vaccine is right for them. This tip sheet can help you or a loved one decide. It can also help you follow through if you do decide to get the vaccine.

**Who should get the flu vaccine?**
Health experts urge **everyone six months of age and older** to get the vaccine.

It is especially important if you, someone you live with, or someone you care for is at high risk of complications from the flu. That includes:
- Children and infants
- Pregnant women
- Adults age 65 and older
- Individuals with chronic health conditions

**Good reasons to get the flu vaccine**
Individuals who get the flu vaccine each year are **up to 60 percent less likely to need treatment for the flu.** They are also less likely to lose time from work or be hospitalized.

The flu is very common and is caused by a virus. It infects about 5–20 percent of Americans (up to one in five individuals) each year.
Similar to other germs, virus particles are too small to be seen by the naked eye. The flu virus spreads easily from person to person by:

- Breathing in virus particles that are released when someone with the flu sneezes, coughs, or talks.
- Touching virus particles left on surfaces or objects handled by someone with the flu and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

Most adults with the flu can infect others from one day before they get sick to five to seven days after. It is most contagious during the first three days of illness. Children and individuals with weak immune systems can spread the flu for a longer period of time.

Having the flu can feel miserable. It usually lasts about one to two weeks. Symptoms include:

- A fever of 100 degrees F or higher, or feeling feverish (not everyone with the flu has a fever).
- Body aches and/or headaches.
- Tiredness.
- A cough.
- Chills.
- A runny or stuffy nose (this is more common with a cold than the flu).
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea (this is most common in children).

The flu can be dangerous and even fatal. More than 200,000 individuals are hospitalized each year for flu-related complications, such as:

- Bacterial pneumonia.
- Ear or sinus infections.
- Dehydration.
- Worsening of chronic health conditions.

The severity of the flu varies from season to season. During the past 30 years, flu-related deaths in the U.S. have ranged from 3,000 to 49,000 per year.

**Is there anyone who should not get the vaccine?**

If you have a mild illness, such as a mild upper respiratory tract infection or diarrhea, *with a fever*, wait until your fever is gone before getting the flu *shot*. But you *can* get a flu shot if you have a mild illness without a fever.
You can get the nasal spray flu vaccine if you have a minor illness with or without a fever. But if you have a stuffy nose, consider waiting until your nose is clear. A stuffy nose makes it harder for the vaccine to reach the lining of your nose.

Talk with your doctor about whether a flu vaccine is right for you if you have:

- A history of severe reaction to a flu vaccine.
- A severe allergy to chicken eggs. Most flu vaccines contain egg protein, but some do not.
- A history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome. It is a severe paralytic illness, also called GBS.

**When should I get the vaccine?**
The flu vaccine protects against the flu for one season. The flu season usually peaks in January or February. But you can get the flu as early as September and as late as May.

It takes about two weeks after you get the vaccine for it to protect you against the virus. In the meantime, you are still at risk for getting the flu. So it is **best to get the vaccine early in the fall**, before the flu season is fully under way.

It is not too late to get the vaccine in December, January, or beyond.

**Where can I get the flu vaccine? What does it cost?**
Talk with your doctor or county health department about where to get the vaccine in your area. You can get the vaccine at your doctor’s office. You may also be able to get it at local drug stores, community centers, and urgent care centers. Many workplaces also offer the flu vaccine.

Check with your health insurance company before getting the vaccine. Most are required to cover the cost.

Help is available if you or your loved ones do not have health insurance or it does not cover vaccines. You can learn more at this website: [http://www.vaccines.gov/getting/pay/index.html](http://www.vaccines.gov/getting/pay/index.html).

**How should I get the vaccine?**
There are two types of vaccine: the flu shot and the nasal spray. Both protect against the same virus strains.
The flu shot is:
- Made with inactivated (killed) flu virus.
- Given by needle.
- Approved for use in individuals people older than 6 months and individuals with chronic health conditions.

The nasal spray is:
- Made with weakened, live flu virus.
- Given with a mist sprayed in your nose.
- Approved for use in healthy individuals between the ages of 2 and 49, except pregnant women.

Can I get the flu from the vaccine?
No. You cannot get the flu from either the flu shot or nasal spray.

The viruses in the flu shot are inactivated (killed) and cannot cause illness. The viruses in the nasal spray are live but weakened. They can only cause infection in the cooler temperatures found in the nose. They cannot infect the lungs or other areas in the body where there are warmer temperatures.

Are there side effects?
Seasonal flu vaccines have a very good track record. Also, newer vaccines are safer and work better than ever.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration keep track of how safe and effective flu vaccines are.

Some individuals have mild reactions to the vaccine. The reactions usually begin soon after you get the vaccine and may last one to two days.

Possible mild side effects of the flu shot include:
- Soreness, redness, and swelling where you got the shot
- Fainting (mainly in teenagers)
- Headaches
- Fever
- Nausea
Possible mild side effects of the nasal spray include:
- Runny nose
- Wheezing
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Muscle aches
- Fever

Serious side effects are rare. They usually begin within a few minutes to a few hours after receiving the shot. Get medical help right away if you have any of these possible serious side effects:
- Trouble breathing
- Hoarseness
- Swelling around the eyes or lips
- Hives
- Paleness
- Weakness
- Racing heart
- Dizziness
- Behavior changes
- High fever

Other ways to protect yourself and others from the flu
The best way to protect yourself and others from the flu is to get a flu vaccine each year. You can also take these daily steps:
- Wash your hands often. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. Germs spread this way.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Try to avoid close contact with others who have flu symptoms.
- If you think you have the flu, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without using fever-reducing medicine.
**Take Action**

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**Talk with your doctor if you are still unsure about getting a flu vaccine.** Write your questions and/or concerns below. Also write down what your doctor says.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**If you have decided to get a flu vaccine, schedule it for as soon as you can. Mark your appointment on your calendar.** Below are some steps you may need to take. Check off each one when you complete it.

- [ ] Call my doctor or health department about where I can get the vaccine. Check to see if I can get it where I work.

- [ ] Call my health insurance company and ask if the cost of the vaccine is covered. Ask about any paper work I may need to fill out for it to be covered.

- [ ] Call the location where I want to get the vaccine. Schedule an appointment.

- [ ] If needed, ask someone to drive me. Or plan for public transportation.

- [ ] Other step(s) I may need to take: _______________________

________________________________________________________________________

**Put a reminder on your calendar to get the flu vaccine each year, early in the fall.**
Take Action

Staying on the path to wellness

When you are ready, choose one or two tips from the section “Other ways to protect you and others from the flu” (see page 5) that you would like to put into action. Set a weekly SMART goal* for each one. Write your goals here and check the boxes when you have completed them.

SMART Goal 1:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

SMART Goal 2:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

*SMART goals are specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic, and timely. For example, “I will go to bed by 10 pm on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday this week.”

SMART goals help you succeed! If you have any trouble setting your weekly SMART goals, ask your health coach for help.

The information in this tip sheet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Before making changes, always talk to your doctor about what is right for you.

Sources: