

## ***FLU SEASON Q & A***

***It seems like every few years, we have a big problem with the flu vaccine supply. Is there enough for everyone who wants it this year?***

Unless a novel or unpredicted strain of influenza shows up this year, like the H1N1 strain in 2009, it appears there will be a plentiful supply of flu vaccine for this fall.

***Why does the vaccine contain the H1N1 virus in it this year?*** Because the H1N1 virus was deadly for so many people worldwide in 2009, the World Health Organization and the CDC decided to include the H1N1 strain in future vaccine preparations to try to keep it from causing so many deaths again. The vaccine has been tested extensively and found to be just as safe as other flu vaccines given in the past.

***Some providers are giving flu shots as early as September. Isn't that too early? Will it wear off?***

No, it is not too early. Even though fall and winter are considered "flu season" you can get sick with the flu any time of the year. Taking a flu vaccine early makes it less likely that you will get the flu when others start getting sick. It is especially recommended that infants, the elderly and people with long term conditions get vaccinated as soon as flu vaccine is available.

***You hear so many people say they were sick for just a day or two with the flu or that they have had the "stomach flu". Just what is influenza and how is it spread?***

Influenza (Flu) is a seasonal, respiratory illness that occurs mainly during the winter months, although it may occur other times of the year, as well. It is caused by one of hundreds of different influenza viruses that are constantly changing.

There is no such thing as having the flu for just one or two days. True influenza lasts at least a week, but the severity and duration of symptoms can be lessened with antiviral meds if given as soon as symptoms start. And there is no such thing as the stomach flu...it is a stomach illness, usually caused by a virus, but not the flu virus.

Influenza is spread from person to person through sneezing, coughing or breathing in the influenza virus. The virus can survive on some surfaces for up to 7 days. Signs and symptoms include fever, sore throat, cough, headache, chills and muscle aches. Young children might also have vomiting and diarrhea.

***Why does the flu cause such alarm among some people? Don't most people just get over it?***

Complications can be severe, even in otherwise healthy people. The virus can cause serious ear and sinus infections, pneumonia, myocarditis (inflammation of the heart), and death. Influenza causes more deaths (averaging about 36,000 deaths per year) than any other vaccine-preventable disease. Most of these are among the elderly, but many children, even healthy ones, also die. Hospitalization rates are highest among children, particularly those less than 1 year old.

***Why do some people still think the flu vaccine causes them to get the flu?***

Because years ago, they used live flu viruses to make the vaccine and yes, some people DID get the flu from taking the flu shot. But since they no longer use live influenza virus to make the vaccine, you CANNOT get the flu from taking the flu vaccine. Some people may experience slight fever, chills or

muscle aches as the vaccine triggers the immune response, but these discomforts can be alleviated with acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Just a word of caution to parents: NEVER give a child aspirin after a flu vaccine as it may cause fatal Reye's syndrome. *Read more about Reye's syndrome at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*

***The Flu Mist nasal spray vaccine that many children get instead of the flu shot seems to be gaining in popularity for adults as well. What is the difference between the flu shot and the nasal spray?***

The injectable flu vaccine (flu shot) is an inactivated (killed) vaccine. It is now recommended for **everyone** six months of age and older who is not allergic to eggs and who has not had Guillain-Barre syndrome. As previously recommended, children and adults with chronic medical conditions and all pregnant women should certainly receive a seasonal flu shot every year.

The second form is a live but "attenuated" or weakened form of the flu vaccine, which is sprayed into the nose of **healthy** children and adults two years of age and older. One dose of seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended annually, beginning around October or November. For children younger than nine who are getting either influenza vaccine for the first time, two doses are recommended, and should be given at least a month apart.

***Many parents are concerned about the amount of mercury contained in the preservative in children's vaccines. Does flu vaccine contain mercury?***

All but a very small amount of mercury has been removed from all vaccines given to children because of past concerns about mercury causing autism. The type of mercury found in the preservative thimerosal is different from the more harmful environmental mercury found in our food chain that causes serious health problems. Even though there is no scientific proof that mercury causes autism, Thimerosal-free (mercury-free) flu vaccine is now available from many providers for those parents who are still concerned about a possible correlation.

***In addition to getting the flu vaccine, what can we do to prevent the spread of the flu virus?***

In addition to being sure you and all of your family members are protected with one of the forms of flu vaccine, you should also follow these simple steps and teach them to your children to help stop the transmission of influenza and other communicable diseases.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue **every** time you cough or sneeze—throw the tissue away after you use it. Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Disinfect your work station daily, especially your computer keyboard, telephone, fax and copy machine and other items used by others.
- If you do get the flu, stay home from work or school. If you are sick, do not go near other people so that you don't make them sick too. Try to get someone else to come in to help care for your young children until you are better.
- Keep sick children home from school without exception. Find a neighbor who can help if your job is inflexible.
- Stay away from people who are sick, especially other children, as much as you can. Limit your newborn's exposure to **all** people for their first few weeks of life.

If you develop flu-like symptoms (usually high fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches), or are exposed to the flu before you get a flu vaccine, your health care professional will decide whether you should take one of the prescription antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu or Relenza. Seek MD care immediately as anti-virals must be started within 48 hours of onset of symptoms.

Remember, the smartest thing you can do to protect your family and others in your care is to **get everyone who can be vaccinated!**

Influenza can be deadly, even for your children. Seasonal influenza vaccine is available at most physicians offices, pharmacies and walk-in clinics, so there is no excuse for not getting everyone vaccinated!

So, be smart ...and don't let the Flu Bug bite you or the ones you love and care for!

*This article was written by Kaye Ivanoff, RN of SHOTS, etc., a Nashville-based provider of all vaccinations needed by adolescents and adults to stay healthy for work or school requirements, world travel and everyday life. For more information about services available for companies and individuals, please call 615-469-7413 or visit [www.SHOTSetc.com](http://www.SHOTSetc.com). SHOTS, etc. is located at 7648 Hwy 70 So. Ste 15, Nashville, TN 37221.*

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