

Know the Facts: Flu and the vaccine that prevents it.

What is the flu and how does it spread?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses which infect the nose, throat, and lungs. Unlike a common cold, it usually causes more severe symptoms that come on suddenly, such as fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body or muscle aches, and extreme fatigue.

The flu spreads mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. It can also spread by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and then touching your own mouth, nose, or eyes.

Who is eligible for flu vaccine? Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine each year, unless advised otherwise by a healthcare provider.

Why should I get vaccinated against flu?



Getting a flu shot every year is the best way to protect against the flu because the virus changes frequently, and the vaccine is updated annually to match circulating strains.



Flu vaccination lowers your risk of getting sick and reduces hospitalizations. Even in years when the vaccine is not a perfect match, it still prevents thousands of hospitalizations and deaths.



The flu vaccine not only lowers your risk of getting seriously ill, it also helps prevent missed days of work and school caused by flu.



Many studies have found that flu vaccination is associated with a lower risk of dementia, stroke, and heart attack.



Seasonal flu vaccines have been safely used for more than 50 years, with hundreds of millions of doses given in the United States, and they continue to have a strong safety record.



Did you know? In North Dakota, only 1 in 4 eligible people got vaccinated against flu last year. That means 75% of people were left unprotected, giving flu more chances to spread in our communities.

Can the flu vaccine give you the flu?

No, the flu vaccine cannot give you the flu or make you more likely to get another respiratory infection. You might still experience flu-like symptoms for several reasons:

- Vaccine reaction: Some people have mild muscle aches or a low fever for a day or two as their body builds protection.
- Two-week window: It takes about two weeks for full immunity, so exposure before or during that time can lead to illness.
- Virus mismatch: Some years the circulating flu strains differ from those in the vaccine, which can reduce effectiveness.
- Other illnesses: Many viruses, like the one that causes COVID-19, can cause similar symptoms, so not all flu-like illness is actually the flu.

Who is most at risk from the flu?

Anyone can get the flu, but certain people are more likely to get very sick. This includes young children, adults 65 and older, pregnant people, and those with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease. Getting vaccinated helps protect both you and those at higher risk.

Did you know?

During the last U.S. flu season, there were:

280 pediatric deaths, the highest number reported since 2004 (excluding the 2009 pandemic).

89% of pediatric deaths were not fully vaccinated. A yearly flu vaccine is the safest way to prevent severe illness and save lives.



I'm young and healthy. Do I really need a flu vaccine?

Even healthy young people can get the flu - and spread it to others. The flu vaccine helps protect you and those around you, like babies, older adults, and people with chronic conditions. It also reduces your risk of missing work from the flu and lowers your chances of severe illness.

Where can I find flu vaccine in my area?

Ask your doctor, local pharmacy, or public health department about the flu vaccine. This year, FluMist (a nasal spray for at-home use) is available for healthy, non-pregnant people ages 2-49. Learn more: bit.ly/3VOIzVx (FluMist) and bit.ly/3IS9LQg (Where to find vaccine providers in ND).