

# Getting Flu Vaccine is a Safe Way to Prevent Serious Illness



For millions of people each year, the flu can bring a runny nose, cough, muscle aches, sore throat, fever, chills, and miserable days spent in bed instead of at work or school. However, you may not realize that it's estimated that more than 200,000 people end up in the hospital from flu complications each year. And while unpredictable, the flu can be deadly. Between 1976 and 2007, CDC estimates that annual flu-associated deaths in the United States have ranged from a low of about 3,000 people to a high of about 49,000 people.

But there's a safe alternative to getting the flu—getting the flu vaccine. The vaccine is a safe way to protect yourself from the flu and its potentially serious complications.

CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get the flu vaccine. Getting the vaccine as soon as it's available in your community will ensure you're protected when flu season hits. You can get the flu vaccine through your doctor, pharmacist, or local health clinic and at flu clinics in local retail outlets.

Flu vaccines are updated each year based on worldwide surveillance to select the three viruses that research indicates are the most likely to cause widespread illness. This year's seasonal flu vaccine will protect against an H3N2 virus, an influenza B virus and the 2009 H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season. However, some people might worry about the safety of flu vaccines, or have particular concerns this year because of the 2009 H1N1 component of the vaccine. But this year's flu vaccines are being made using the same production and safety methods that have been standard for decades, during which hundreds of millions of flu vaccines have been safely given. During last year's flu season, a special vaccine was made to protect against the 2009 H1N1 virus because it emerged too late to be included in the seasonal flu vaccine. That vaccine was made using the

same production and safety standards as regular flu vaccines and it's estimated that more than 80 million people in the United States were safely vaccinated against 2009 H1N1. The 2009 H1N1 vaccine had a very similar safety profile to seasonal flu vaccines.

“Stringent vaccine safety processes are followed every year for flu vaccines and the same process was followed for the 2009 H1N1 vaccine. Before flu vaccines are approved, they undergo careful testing, and each batch is checked for purity and strength before it is released,” says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and CDC's Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. “Seasonal flu vaccines have been given for more than 50 years, and have consistently had a very safe track record.

The most common side effects from flu shots have been soreness, redness, or tenderness where the shot was given; fever; and aches. Some people who have gotten the nasal-spray flu vaccine, in use over the past seven years, have had runny nose, cough, or nasal congestion. Neither the flu shot nor the nasal-spray vaccine can give you the flu.

Every year, CDC works closely with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), health care providers, state and local health departments, and other partners to ensure the highest safety standards for all flu vaccines. CDC and FDA both share responsibility for monitoring the safety of vaccines and ensuring systems are in place to promptly detect unexpected health problems following vaccination. “Vaccines are medicines, and taking any medicine can carry some risk,” adds Dr. Schuchat. “With the flu vaccine, that risk is extremely small. The risks associated with getting the flu are far greater.”

**For more information about the dangers of flu and the benefits and safety of the flu vaccine, talk to your doctor or nurse, visit <http://www.cdc.gov>, or call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).**