

# Common **Myths** about Influenza (Flu) and the Flu Vaccine

Every year people get the flu, which can easily be prevented by a flu shot or nasal flu mist. Some people do not get a flu vaccine because of “myths” or ideas which are not true. By learning the facts about the flu vaccine and getting vaccinated each year, you can avoid getting the flu.

## **MYTH**

*“The flu isn’t a serious disease.”*

## **FACT**

Flu is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and lungs, and can lead to pneumonia. Each year, thousands of people in the US die from flu or flu-related illnesses, and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized. Most who die are 65 years and older, but now even young people are at much higher risk. The new **H1N1 (“Swine Flu”)** is most dangerous to those **younger than age 50**. The World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control now advise everyone over six months of age get an **annual flu vaccine**.

At a minimum, flu vaccine keeps you from being very ill and missing work or school for five to seven days. Flu vaccine lets you pick the five to seven day vacation instead of letting the flu pick the days off for you!

## **MYTH**

*“The flu vaccine can cause the flu.”*

## **FACT**

The flu vaccine **cannot** cause the flu. Plain vomiting & diarrhea are not the flu. “Stomach flu” is from a stomach virus and is not the real flu. These symptoms and “colds” occur during the same season flu vaccine is given. So if you get any of these symptoms after a flu vaccine, it was a coincidence and bad luck. The flu vaccine did not and cannot cause these symptoms.

## **MYTH**

*“I never get the flu so I don’t need a flu shot.”*

## **FACT**

Flu vaccine is like a seat belt. If you never had a car accident, it doesn’t mean you don’t need a seat belt! You never know when you’ll have a car accident or when you’ll get the flu. If you choose no seat belt or no flu shot, you may have regrets...if you survive.

## **MYTH**

*“I don’t care if I get the flu. It won’t harm anyone but me”.*

## **FACT**

Children under the age of six months are not eligible to receive the flu vaccine. These infants and young children can easily become very sick from the flu. So if you are in contact with young children as a family member, friend or caregiver, you can bring great harm to them. Choosing to get the flu vaccine protects these infants and children.

## **MYTH**

*“I can’t get my flu vaccine today because I am sick.”*

## **FACT**

You can get a flu vaccine at the same time you have a fever (as long as it’s not very high) or if you have a mild respiratory illness (like a cold). But if you are very sick, you may need to get your flu vaccine at another time.



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## MYTH

*“Only older people need a flu vaccine.”*

## FACT

Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease need to get an annual flu shot. Because the new **H1N1 (“Swine Flu”)** is most dangerous to those **younger than age 50**, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control now advises **everyone** over six months of age get an **annual flu vaccine**. Remember that children and teens are most likely to give flu to adults. It is also safe and important that pregnant women get the flu vaccine.

## MYTH

*“The side effects are worse than the flu.”*

## FACT

The worst side effect you’re likely to get from a flu shot is a mildly sore arm. The nasal flu mist vaccine might cause brief and very mild nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, or cough. Serious problems from the flu vaccine are very rare.

## MYTH

*“You must get the flu vaccine before December.”*

## FACT

Flu vaccine can be given anytime before and during the flu season. The vaccine is usually available and can be given as early as August or September. It takes two weeks for the flu vaccine to become most effective. It is fine to get flu vaccine in late winter or spring too. Remember, the H1N1 started in April 2009, and continued through the summer months.

## MYTH

*“I got vaccinated last year so I don’t need a flu vaccine this year.”*

## FACT

Influenza viruses change every year and so does the flu vaccine. Even if you got vaccinated last year, you may not be protected against this year’s flu. Also, the effects of the flu vaccine go away over time, so last year’s flu shot won’t help you this year.

## MYTH

*“People with asthma shouldn’t get the flu vaccination.”*

## FACT

People with asthma are at high risk of getting very sick from the flu. The flu shot will not cause an asthma attack. Respiratory infections like the flu are more serious in patients with asthma, and the flu can often cause pneumonia and an asthma attack. It is very important for all people with asthma get the flu shot every year.

## MYTH

*“The flu vaccine does not work.”*

## FACT

Most of the time, the flu vaccine will prevent the flu. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the vaccine has ranged from 70% to 90% when there is a good match between circulating viruses and those in the vaccine. Getting the vaccine is your best protection against this disease.



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