Why get vaccinated?

Influenza ("flu") is a contagious disease.

It is caused by the influenza virus, which spreads from infected persons to the nose or throat of others.

Other illnesses can have the same symptoms and are often mistaken for influenza. But only an illness caused by the influenza virus is really influenza.

Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, it lasts only a few days. It can cause:
- fever
- sore throat
- chills
- fatigue
- cough
- headache
- muscle aches

Some people get much sicker. Influenza can lead to pneumonia and can be dangerous for people with heart or breathing conditions. It can cause high fever and seizures in children. Influenza kills about 36,000 people each year in the United States.

Influenza vaccine can prevent influenza.

Live, attenuated influenza vaccine (nasal spray)

There are two types of influenza vaccine:

Live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) was licensed in 2003. LAIV contains live but attenuated (weakened) influenza virus. It is sprayed into the nostrils rather than injected into the muscle. It is recommended for healthy children and adults from 5 through 49 years of age, who are not pregnant.

Inactivated influenza vaccine, sometimes called the “flu shot,” has been used for many years and is given by injection. This vaccine is described in a separate Vaccine Information Statement.

Influenza viruses are constantly changing. Therefore, influenza vaccines are updated every year, and annual vaccination is recommended.

For most people influenza vaccine prevents serious influenza-related illness. It will not prevent “influenza-like” illnesses caused by other viruses.

It takes about 2 weeks for protection to develop after vaccination, and protection can last up to a year.

Who can get LAIV?

Live, intranasal influenza vaccine is approved for healthy children and adults from 5 through 49 years of age, including those who can spread influenza to people at high risk, such as:

- Household contacts and out-of-home caretakers of infants from 0-59 months of age.
- Physicians and nurses, and family members or any one else in close contact with people at risk of serious influenza.

Influenza vaccine is also recommended for anyone else who wants to reduce their chance of getting influenza.

LAIV may be considered for:

- People who provide essential community services.
- People living in dormitories or under other crowded conditions, to prevent outbreaks.

Who should not get LAIV?

LAIV is not licensed for everyone. The following people should check with their health-care provider about getting the inactivated vaccine (flu shot).

- Adults 50 years of age or older or children younger than 5.
- People who have long-term health problems with:
  - heart disease
  - kidney disease
  - lung disease
  - metabolic disease, such as diabetes
  - asthma
  - anemia, and other blood disorders
- People with a weakened immune system.
- Children or adolescents on long-term aspirin treatment.
- Pregnant women.
- Anyone with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome (a severe paralytic illness, also called GBS).

Inactivated influenza vaccine (the flu shot) is the preferred vaccine for people (including health-care workers, and family members) coming in close contact with anyone who has a severely weakened immune system (that is, anyone who requires care in a protected environment).
Some people should talk with a doctor before getting either influenza vaccine:

- Anyone who has ever had a serious allergic reaction to eggs or to a previous dose of influenza vaccine.
- People who are moderately or severely ill should usually wait until they recover before getting flu vaccine. If you are ill, talk to your doctor or nurse about whether to reschedule the vaccination. People with a mild illness can usually get the vaccine.

If rare reactions occur with any new product, they may not be identified until thousands, or millions, of people have used it. Over four million doses of LAIV have been distributed since it was licensed, and no serious problems have been identified. Like all vaccines, LAIV will continue to be monitored for unusual or severe problems.

**7 What if there is a severe reaction?**

**What should I look for?**
- Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.

**What should I do?**
- Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or health department to report the reaction by filing a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form.
- You can file this report through the VAERS website at www.vaers.hhs.gov, or by calling 1-800-822-7967. VAERS does not provide medical advice.

**8 The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program**

In the event that you or your child has a serious reaction to a vaccine, a federal program has been created to help pay for the care of those who have been harmed.

For details about the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, call 1-800-338-2382 or visit their website at www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation.

**9 How can I learn more?**

- Ask your immunization provider. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call 1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)
  - Visit CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/flu