

Fight the Flu with Facts

Courtesy of Families Fighting Flu (www.familiesfightingflu.org)

Myth #1: You can get the flu from the flu vaccine.

FALSE: This is impossible. The flu vaccine does not actually carry a live virus; it contains inactivated or weakened organisms. Vaccine manufacturers grow the flu virus in eggs, then cleanse and chemically treat the virus to deactivate it.

Myth #2: The flu is just a bad cold.

FALSE: The flu is a serious disease. It is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract (nose, throat and lungs). In the United States, about 200,000 people are hospitalized and tens of thousands of people die each year because of the flu. **The flu kills more Americans every year than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined.**

Myth #3: It is not necessary for children to receive a flu vaccination.

FALSE: Children are two-to-three times more likely to develop influenza than adults because of their less-developed immune systems. More than 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized due to the flu each year. In addition, the flu kills nearly 100 American children under 5 years of age every year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu every year.

Myth #4: The side effects of the vaccine are worse than the flu itself.

FALSE: Most people who get the flu shot have no reaction. Up to 25 percent may have some redness and slight swelling at the site of injection; the risk of a severe allergic reaction in those who receive a vaccine is less than one in four million.

Myth #5: You must be vaccinated in the fall to be protected against the flu.

FALSE: It is recommended to get vaccinated as soon as the vaccine becomes available in your community. Typically, the flu virus tends to spread from October to May, with most cases occurring in January or February. However, vaccines can be given at any time during the flu season – even getting vaccinated later in the season (December through March) can still help protect you from the flu.

Myth #6: Only older people need the flu vaccine.

FALSE: The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu every year.

Myth #7: Taking vitamin C or Echinacea will prevent the flu.

FALSE: There is no conclusive evidence that these treatments are effective against the flu.

Myth #8: The flu vaccine is 100 percent effective in preventing the flu.

FALSE: Although the flu vaccine is not 100 percent effective, it's important that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu to help prevent illness and reduce the spread of the virus in the community. The more people who get vaccinated against the flu every year, the lower the risk of catching the disease.

Myth #9: Getting the flu vaccine every year isn't necessary.

FALSE: The vaccine needs to be given every year. Because flu viruses are constantly changing, flu vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the most recent and most commonly circulating viruses. In addition, a person's immune protection from the vaccine declines over time; therefore, annual vaccination is needed for optimal protection.

Myth #10: Healthy people don't need a flu vaccine.

FALSE: The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu every year. Infants younger than 6 months old are too young to be vaccinated. Protect them by getting yourself, other children and family members, and close contacts vaccinated. This will help prevent spreading the virus to infants. During the 2010-2011 flu season, roughly half of the kids who died from influenza had healthy medical histories.

Myth #11: Pregnant women can't get the flu vaccine.

FALSE: The CDC recommends vaccination for pregnant women as the safest and most important method for protecting a mother and her unborn child from the flu. Pregnant women are at risk for developing serious complications from the flu, which may include premature delivery and miscarriage, or death. In fact, a study in the *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology* found that babies born to moms who were vaccinated during pregnancy were up to 48 percent less likely to be hospitalized for the flu in the early months of life. The flu vaccine has been given to millions of pregnant women over many years and has not been shown to harm expectant mothers or their children. Flu protection is a critical, life-saving measure that every mother should take seriously each and every year.