

# Flu Shot: Myths and Facts

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people age 6 months and older should get a flu shot every year. But there are myths about the flu shot that keep some people from getting it. Here are myths and facts about the flu shot that you need to know.

**Myth:** The flu shot can give you the flu.

**Fact:** A flu shot cannot give you the flu. Flu shots are made either with flu viruses that are not active or with no flu viruses at all. A person might get flu symptoms after a flu shot because:

- The flu shot only protects against influenza and the person got some other type of virus, like rhinovirus, that causes symptoms like the flu.
- The person was exposed to the flu virus shortly before or after getting the flu shot, which takes about two weeks to fully work.
- The person was exposed to a flu virus that is different from the viruses the flu shot is made to protect against.

**Myth:** Getting the flu builds up your immune system better than getting the flu shot.

**Fact:** The flu can be a serious disease. It can be very harmful to young children, older adults, and people with chronic health issues like asthma, heart disease, and diabetes. The flu can lead to serious complications, hospitalization, or death. So getting a flu shot is safer than risking illness to get immune protection.

**Myth:** I don't really need a flu shot every year.

**Fact:** Immune system protection from the shot gets lower over time. A yearly flu shot gives you the best protection against the flu.

**Myth:** There can be serious reactions to the flu shot.

**Fact:** Serious allergic reactions to the flu shot are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot. And effective treatments are available. The most common side effects from the flu shot are soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given. There may also be low-grade fever, headache, and muscle aches.

**Myth:** It is too late to get the flu shot after Thanksgiving (or at the end of November).

**Fact:** The flu shot is helpful as long as flu viruses are going around. Flu season usually peaks between December and March, but people can get the flu as late as May. Getting a flu shot after Thanksgiving or later can still help protect you from the flu.

**Myth:** I can't have flu and COVID-19 at the same time.

**Fact:** You can have the flu and other respiratory illnesses, and have COVID-19 at the same time. Health experts are still studying how common this can be.

Some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar. This makes it hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone.

**Myth:** A flu vaccine will protect me against COVID-19.

**Fact:** Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19. But a flu shot has many other important benefits. Flu vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization, and death. Getting a flu shot this fall will be more important than ever, not only to reduce your risk from flu, but also to ease the burden on health care providers and facilities.

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**If you need help scheduling your annual flu shot, please call Member Services at 1-888-978-0862 (TTY 711), seven days a week, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.**

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Source: "Misconceptions about Seasonal Flu and Flu Vaccines," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/misconceptions.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/misconceptions.htm) (accessed July 12, 2018).

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# People age 65 and older need a flu shot

## Influenza (flu) can be a serious illness, especially for older adults.

**Fact:** People age 65 and older are at high risk of developing serious complications from flu, compared with young, healthy adults.

This risk is due in part to changes in immune defenses with increasing age. While flu seasons vary in severity from year to year, people age 65 and older bear the greatest

burden of severe flu disease. In recent years, it's estimated that between 70% and 85% of seasonal flu-related deaths in the United States have occurred among people age 65 and older, and between 50% and 70% of seasonal flu-related hospitalizations have occurred among people in this age group.

## An annual flu vaccine is the best way to reduce your risk of flu and its potentially serious consequences.

**Fact:** While flu vaccine can vary in how well it works, vaccination is the best way to prevent flu and its potentially serious complications.

Flu vaccination has been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness and more serious flu outcomes that can result in

hospitalization or even death in older people. While some people who get vaccinated may still get sick, getting a flu vaccine has been shown in several studies to reduce severity of illness in those people.

## Flu shots have a good safety record and do not cause flu.

**Fact:** The side effects of flu shots are mild when compared to the potentially serious consequences of flu infection.

After getting your flu shot, you may experience some mild side effects. The most common side effects include soreness, tenderness, and redness and/or swelling where

the shot was given. Sometimes you might have headache, muscle aches, fever, and nausea or feel tired. The high dose and adjuvanted flu vaccines may result in more of these mild side effects.

## Long-term medical conditions can also put you at high risk of serious flu complications.

**Fact:** Flu can make long-term health problems worse, even if they are well managed.

Diabetes, asthma, and chronic heart disease are among the most common long-term medical conditions that place people at high risk of developing serious flu complications. It is particularly important that all adults with these or other chronic medical conditions get a flu shot every year.

If you have flu symptoms — even if you had a flu shot — call your primary care provider. They can prescribe medicine, called antiviral drugs, to treat flu and lessen the chance of serious illness. These medicines work better the sooner they are started.

For more information, visit: [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) or call **1-800-CDC-INFO**

**Fact:** There are prescription drugs that can treat influenza virus infections. People age 65 and older should be treated with influenza antiviral drugs if they get sick with flu.

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First Choice VIP Care Plus is a health plan that contracts with both Medicare and South Carolina Medicaid to provide benefits of both programs to enrollees.

ATENCIÓN: Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame a Servicios al Miembro de First Choice VIP Care Plus al 1-888-978-0862 (TTY 711), los siete días de la semana, de 8 a.m. a 8 p.m. La llamada es gratuita.