

Flu Fast Facts

Medical experts share vital virus tidbits every Katy parent should know

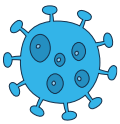
Written by Leigh Ann Mitchell

Flu season is here. Katy medical professionals shed light on this highly contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses, the vaccine to treat it, and what to watch for.



1. How Does the Vaccine Work?

The flu season begins in fall and lasts through spring. The vaccine is available as an injection or nasal spray. Executive director of the Center for Vaccine Awareness and Research at Texas Children's Hospital, Dr. Carol Baker, explains, "The injection is made by growing viruses in eggs, purifying the viruses, and then killing them. There is also an inactivated vaccine that is not made in eggs, called 'cell free,' which goes through a similar process." The inactive vaccines cannot cause the flu; they cause the body to respond by making antibodies in the blood. "The nasal spray is made the same way as the shot, but instead of killing the viruses, they are weakened," Dr. Baker says. The nasal spray is not for everyone. It is recommended for patients ages 2 through 49 who do not have asthma and are overall healthy. Primary care physician at Houston Methodist West Hospital, Dr. Hema Patel, says the flu types chosen to be in the current vaccine are based on the type of influenza that is being spread.



2. Who Should Get the Shot?

The recommended age individuals should begin receiving the vaccine is 6 months and older. "For children 6 months through 8 years who are being vaccinated for the first time, it takes two flu vaccine doses one month apart to develop protection," says Dr. Baker. "For infants less than 6 months, giving flu vaccine during pregnancy is safe for mother and baby and also protects mother and baby against the flu."



3. Who Should Not Get the Shot?

Patients who are under the age of 6 months or have a severe life-threatening allergy to the vaccine should not receive the shot. Many workplaces require the annual flu vaccine. "All healthcare facilities where employees come into contact with patients make flu vaccinations mandatory," says Samuel Park, a pharmacist at PSC Pharmacy in Katy.



4. What Are the Side Effects?

"While a flu vaccine cannot give you flu illness, there are different side effects that may be associated with getting a flu shot or a nasal spray flu vaccine," says Park. "These side effects are mild and short-lasting, especially when compared to symptoms of a bad case of flu." Side effects include soreness or redness at the injection site, low-grade fever, or aches. The nasal spray may cause runny nose, headache, sore throat, fever, and cough.



5. What Are the Benefits?

"Flu vaccination may make your illness milder if you do get sick," Dr. Patel says. "Flu vaccination can reduce the risk of more serious flu outcomes, like hospitalization." Older adults, people with chronic health conditions, and infants too young to receive the vaccine are at high risk of becoming seriously ill from the flu. There are many locations where you can get the flu vaccine. "The influenza vaccine is available for adolescents and adults at pharmacies and grocery stores," Dr. Baker adds. "The vaccine can also be found in hospitals for patients and the offices of pediatricians, family practitioners, and the local health department." **KM**

LEIGH ANN MITCHELL and her family have taken measures in flu prevention by receiving their flu vaccines.

TIPS TO PREVENT THE FLU

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth

Wash your hands frequently

Cover coughs and sneezes with elbow

Avoid close contact with those who are sick

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