



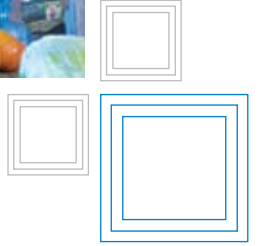
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Flu





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Beat Back the Flu Bug

Chills, fever, coughing, sneezing—and an important deadline. Flu season has major implications for all of us and can ruin your best-laid plans. Each year, millions of unvaccinated adults report coming down with the flu (influenza), but this contagious lung disease is almost entirely preventable.

If you get the flu, you may find it difficult to handle your work, your children, and your household activities. Worse yet, you could spread the flu to family members and friends before you even know you have it.

That's why at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, we encourage you to get the facts about the flu and get yourself and your loved ones vaccinated each flu season. It will save you aches, pains, and can help keep you healthy well into the spring.

The Flu

Unlike other viral respiratory infections such as the common cold, the flu often causes severe illness. Influenza is often referred to as a respiratory disease, but it affects the whole body. The victim usually becomes acutely ill with fever, chills, weakness, loss of appetite, and aching of the head, back, arms, and legs. Symptoms may also include a sore throat and dry cough, nausea, and burning eyes. A fever usually mounts quickly; a temperature may rise to 104° F, but after two or three days, it usually subsides. The patient is often left exhausted and congested for days or weeks afterwards.

Is the Flu a Serious Illness?

The flu is typically a moderately severe illness for healthy children and adults. Most people are back on their feet within a week.

For people who are not healthy or well to begin with, influenza can be very severe and even fatal. In addition, complications can occur. Most of these complications are bacterial infections because the body can be so weakened by influenza that its defenses against bacteria are low. Bacterial pneumonia is the most common complication of influenza, but the sinuses and inner ears may also become inflamed and painful.

Take Your Best Shot

The flu can best be prevented with the current influenza vaccine. This vaccine is made each year so that the vaccine can contain influenza viruses that are expected to cause illness that year.

The viruses in the vaccine are inactivated, so that when you are given the vaccine you cannot come down with the flu. Instead, you will develop protective antibodies that recognize and eliminate the virus before symptoms set in.

When Should I Get Vaccinated?

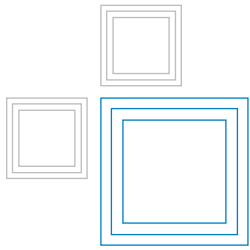
Early November until late December is the best time to get your influenza shot if you are a healthy adult. Adults develop peak antibody protection against influenza infection two weeks after vaccination. Such a yearly vaccination has been found to be about 75 percent effective in preventing influenza. It may also reduce the severity of influenza and can save your life.



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Education





Expert Answers to Common Flu Questions

Take Your Best Shot . . .

Q: Will the flu shot make me sick?

A: You won't catch the flu from a flu shot. Some people get a mild reaction, such as a red or tender area where the vaccination was given.

Q: How does the vaccine work?

A: The new vaccine made each year contains the viruses that are expected that year. The viruses in the vaccine are inactivated, or "killed," so no one can get the flu from the vaccine. Instead, the vaccine causes the body to protect itself against the virus by building up antibodies. These antibodies are ready for action in about two weeks and are most effective for approximately two months after vaccination.

Q: When should I get a flu shot?

A: If you are a healthy adult, get your flu shot between early November and late December. Then the vaccine should last through the flu season, and you will have maximum protection before the flu virus starts spreading. Adults develop peak antibody protection against influenza two weeks after vaccination.

Q: Why do I need a flu shot every year?

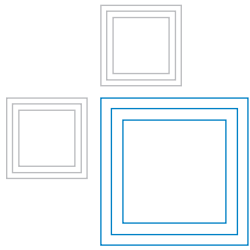
A: The virus that causes the flu may belong to one of three different flu virus families: A, B, or C. Each family has many viral strains, like several brothers and sisters. The influenza A family is more serious than the B family. Each year, a new vaccine is made to fight the family of viruses that is expected to cause illness that year.

Q: If I need more information, where can I call?

A: Call your doctor or clinic or get in touch with the American Lung Association of Massachusetts. Contact the local American Lung Association in any state by calling **1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872)**. Online go to: www.cdc.gov/flu.

Q: What is influenza (the flu)?

A: Influenza is an infectious disease caused by a virus. Flu viruses infect the lungs and many other parts of the body, causing illness. Someone who has the flu spreads the virus, often by sneezing and coughing. The viruses are inhaled by anyone close by. Flu is also spread by direct hand contact. When flu is widespread in the community, anyone can get it.



Common Flu Questions (cont...)

Q: Who needs a flu shot?

A: In general, anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu can get vaccinated. However, it is recommended by Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices that certain people should get vaccinated each year. They are either people who are at high risk of having serious flu complications or people who live with or care for those at high risk for serious complications. During flu seasons when vaccine supplies are limited or delayed, ACIP makes recommendations regarding priority groups for vaccination. People who should get vaccinated each year are:

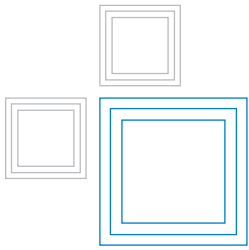
1. People at high risk for complications from the flu, including:
 - Children aged six months until their fifth birthday
 - Adults and children who have chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus);
 - Adults and children who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by human immunodeficiency virus);
 - Adults and children who have any condition (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders) that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk for aspiration;
 - Pregnant women
 - People 50 years of age and older
 - People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
 - People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
2. People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu (see above)
 - Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than six months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)
 - Health care workers

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm>

Q: Who should not get a flu shot?

A: The vast majority of people can get a flu shot. You should not get a shot, or check with your doctor first, if:

- You are allergic to eggs (eggs are used to make the flu vaccine)
- You are allergic to thimerosal (used in some contact lens solutions)
- You have had a severe reaction to a flu shot in the past
- You have ever had Guillain-Barré syndrome within six weeks of getting a flu shot previously
- You have an acute illness at the time of the shot
- You have a fever at the time of the flu shot



Common Flu Questions (cont...)

Q: Why do I need a shot? Is the flu that serious?

A: Influenza is more than an inconvenience. It's a contagious disease that strikes the lungs, causing swelling and inflammation. Although it's a respiratory disease, flu affects the whole body with chills, fever, weakness, loss of appetite, and aching. The flu sufferer may also have a sore throat, dry cough, nausea, and burning eyes. Often the person feels exhausted for days afterward. Bacterial pneumonia is the most common complication of the flu. Influenza is much more serious than a cold or the stomach illness that is sometimes confused with the flu.

Is It a Cold or the Flu?

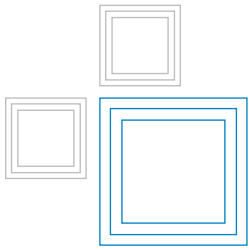
Flu*

- Fever of 102°–104°
- Lasting three to four or more days
- Muscle aches
- Chills
- Severe cough
- Extreme fatigue
- General weakness

Cold*

- Possible fever of 101° or less
- Sneezing
- Cough
- Congestion
- Symptoms mostly affect you above the neck

* You may have only one of a few symptoms. Call the Blue Care® Line at 1-888-247-BLUE (2583) or your physician to find out how best to treat your symptoms.



What to Do If You Get the Flu:

- Call the Blue Care® Line at **1-888-247-BLUE (2583)** for self-care tips from a registered nurse—available 24 hours a day—or call your physician.
- Drink lots of hot liquids to soothe your throat, help unplug your nose, and rehydrate your body.
- Lubricate your throat by sucking on lozenges or hard candies.
- Don't suppress coughs that bring up mucus. You may need to ask your health care provider to suggest an over-the-counter expectorant.
- Avoid milk or dairy products for a few days. These items may make it hard to cough up mucus.
- Check with your doctor to see if regular doses of acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen are appropriate for you.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to prevent those around you from getting sick.
- If possible, stay home to prevent others from catching your illness.
- Before returning to work or other activities, make sure you are fever-free for at least 24 hours.
- Get some rest!

