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The Value of Vaccine

This annual reminder for getting an influenza (flu) vaccination looks a bit different in 2020. As always, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are encouraging immunization as an essential way to protect individuals and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks. Reducing outbreaks lowers the burden of respiratory illness during the upcoming influenza season.

Because of concerns about COVID-19, if a vaccine recipient develops fever after vaccination, they should stay home until they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications. Influenza vaccination does not cause [respiratory symptoms common in COVID-19](#), such as cough or shortness of breath. If the vaccine recipient develops such symptoms, or if fever does not resolve within 72 hours of vaccination without the use of fever-reducing medications, the recipient should contact their healthcare provider.

According to the CDC, there are no data providing optimal timing of a flu vaccination or effectiveness in those with COVID-19 or who are recovering from COVID-19. Additionally, some patients with COVID-19 are treated with medications that can suppress the immune system. It is possible that these medications may diminish immune response to influenza vaccination, but the ideal time to vaccinate after discontinuation of these medications is not known. These individuals might also be at increased risk for severe illness due to influenza as a result of immunosuppression. Timing of vaccination for these individuals should be guided by considerations of the individual's underlying risk of medical complications due to influenza, and the degree of influenza circulation in the local community.

One myth that must be addressed is that flu vaccine can infect a person with influenza. The truth is that a flu shot **cannot** cause a person to be sick with the flu. Rarely, what *can* happen to some people is mild side effects like soreness from the shot, low-grade fever, muscle aches, or nausea that all go away within a few days. This is not because the shot give you the flu, but could be caused by a variety of reasons like being exposed to the flu virus before or during the two-week period it takes the body to gain protection, being exposed to another flu-like illness that a flu vaccine does not protect against, or you may be one of the unlucky few whose body does not respond to a flu vaccine. While a vaccination is not a sure bet against the flu, it can reduce risk. The vaccine is designed to act like a live flu virus so your body reacts by forming antibodies that build a defense system to kill intruding flu virus cells on site if they enter later.

Those with an allergy to eggs will experience more potentially serious side effects and should consult a physician before getting a vaccine. There are several different flu vaccines available to people of various ages and conditions. It is best to ask your doctor which is right for you or your child.

Influenza is a serious illness. It is responsible for billions of dollars in medical costs and thousands of deaths each year in the United States. It is not something to take lightly.

Contact your local health department, clinic, hospital, or visit <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/> for more information.