Should I Get a Flu Vaccine This Year?
A Decision Aid

Getting influenza ("the flu") is common. Flu spreads in late fall and winter each year. Some flu seasons are more severe than others. In the 2024-2025 flu season, 82 million people got sick with the flu. Out of every 4 people who got sick, 1 to 2 were sick enough to see a doctor, and over a million people total needed hospital stays for flu. While many people will not get sick enough from the flu to go to the hospital, it is hard to tell who may. Your chances of being very sick, needing hospital care, or even dying from the flu are higher if you are very young, are a senior adult, or if you have certain health problems. Flu passes from person to person in highly contagious tiny droplets in the air when sneezing or coughing. If someone you live with has the flu, in the next 3 days your chances of getting the flu are about 1 in 3.

Flu vaccines lower your risk of severe flu, needing hospital care, dying from flu, and passing flu to others. They lower the chance that you get the flu by about half, but you still may get a mild case. Flu vaccines update each year to match the predicted active flu strains. Some years, this match and how well the vaccine works is better than others.

Flu vaccines come as a shot (for persons ages 6 months and older) and a nasal spray (for persons ages 2-49, without certain medical problems or are pregnant). Infants and children getting their first flu vaccine need 2 doses and everyone else gets a single yearly dose. The nasal spray version of the flu vaccine is a live attenuated vaccine and should not be used by people with immune deficiencies. It is also important that all members of their family or other household contacts avoid the nasal spray flu vaccine.

Flu vaccines are safe. Common side effects of the shot may include your arm feeling sore, your skin changing color at the shot site, or feeling a bit ill. Very rare side effects include muscle weakness (Guillain-Barré syndrome) or an allergic reaction. Side effects of the nasal spray include runny nose, fever, cough, and sore throat. You cannot get the flu from either type of flu vaccine.

Some people may decide to get a flu vaccine, some may not, and others may need help to decide if the vaccine is right for them or their family. We made this aid to help you to decide for yourself, and to talk with your health care professional about this decision. The decision is yours, but we hope to give you the information to help you make the best decision for you! Please ask your health care professional about any questions or concerns. The best decision is the choice that you think keeps you healthy and makes you feel most at ease.

This decision aid is for you if:

✓ You are not sure you want to get the flu vaccine this year

✓ You or a family member has been told that you are at high risk for a more severe case of flu

✓ You are worried you could have a severe case of flu, or pass it to a loved one

✓ You have had side effects from the flu vaccine in the past, and wonder if it is worth trying again

✓ You had flu in the past even though you got the vaccine, and wonder if it is worth getting the vaccine this year

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Comparing Your Choices About Getting a Flu Vaccine This Year

Why You May Want the Flu Vaccine This Year	Why You May Be Questioning the Need for a Flu Vaccine This Year
• You are 65 or older • You are pregnant or on a biologic drug • You have chronic lung disease or other high-risk problems • You live or spend time with someone at high risk for severe flu • You have had a bad case of the flu in the past • You do not want to miss work, school, or cause anyone else to • You work/go to school in an area at high risk of getting or spreading the flu	• You are young, healthy, and not worried about the flu • You are not sure if the flu vaccines will benefit you • You or the people you live or spend time with are not high risk for the flu • You worry about past or future side effects from the vaccine • You are concerned about the cost of getting the vaccine • You have not talked with a doctor about your flu risk

High Risk Conditions for Influenza (Flu)

Lung disease (including asthma and COPD), cancer, stroke, kidney disease, liver disease, heart disease, cystic fibrosis, dementia, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, disabilities, HIV infection, mental health conditions, tuberculosis (TB), pregnancy, overweight, high blood pressure, immunocompromised, organ transplant, current or former smoker, neurologic conditions, metabolic disorders, children/adolescents on aspirin therapy, and persons with impaired muscle or lung function who struggle to cough, swallow, or clear fluids.

What may affect your decision?

Check all that apply and what you wish to discuss with your health care professional:

- ☐ Am I, my child, or other family members likely to have severe flu? (see high risk conditions above)
- ☐ Am I, my child, or other family likely to get side effects from the flu vaccine?
- ☐ Am I, my child, or other family likely to still get severe flu even if we get the vaccine?
- ☐ Am I, my child, or other family likely to give flu to someone around us?
- ☐ Is the vaccine safe?

Let's work through the key steps involved in making this decision…

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Step 1: What Are the Risks, Benefits, and Facts About the Flu and Flu Vaccines

RECENT FLU STATS (2025-26)

32-57 million people had the flu

15-25 million people went to a doctor for the flu

390,000-800,000 needed hospital care for flu

24,000-81,000 people died from flu

WHO IS AT RISK FOR SEVERE FLU?

Ages younger than 2 or older than 65 years

Have high-risk conditions including pregnancy (page 2)

Live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities

Black, Hispanic or Latiné, and Indigenous persons

Anyone who did not get the flu vaccine

FLU RISKS IN SENIOR ADULTS

70-85% of flu-related deaths occur in people 65 years and older

50-70% of flu-related hospital stays occur in people 65 years and older



FLU RISKS FOR PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

9 of 10 people hospitalized with flu have a chronic illness (asthma is common)

Flu can trigger and worsen asthma

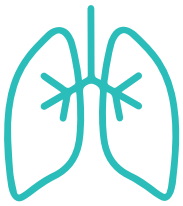
People with asthma are more likely to get pneumonia after flu

Heart attack risk is **6 times higher** within a week of getting the flu (vaccination cuts this risk)

Getting the vaccine cuts the risk of needing hospital care if you have chronic lung disease (asthma, COPD) or diabetes

POTENTIAL FLU COMPLICATIONS

Children: pneumonia, dehydration, worsening of heart disease or asthma, sinus problems, ear infections, brain dysfunction such as encephalopathy, and death



Adults: sinus problems, ear infections, sepsis, inflammation of the heart (myocarditis), brain (encephalitis) or muscle tissues (myositis, rhabdomyolysis), and multi-organ failure (for example, respiratory and kidney failure), worsening asthma, and death

VACCINE BENEFITS DURING PREGNANCY

Lowers the risk of:

- Flu-related lung infection by half
- Needing hospital care for flu by almost half (40%)
- Babies younger than 6 months getting sick with flu by one-third
- Hospital stays or ER visits for flu by half



Protects the baby until they get the vaccine (age 6 months or older)

HOW WELL FLU VACCINES WORK IN ADULTS



It varies by year: In 2025-2026, the vaccine worked for **nearly 4 out of 10** people. In 2024-2025, it worked for **nearly 6 out of 10** people.

During the 2024-2025 flu season, the vaccine prevented **10 million** cases, **5 million** doctor visits, 180,000 hospital stays, and 12,000 deaths

People who get the flu vaccine have **35% lower** risk of going to emergency or urgent care, and **27% lower** risk of staying in hospital for flu

FLU VACCINES ARE EFFECTIVE IN CHILDREN



Vaccination **lowers the risk** of children:

- Needing hospital stays by up to 78%
- Getting sick with severe flu by 75%
- Needing ER visits by half
- Dying from flu — 90% of flu-related deaths in 2024-2025 were in unvaccinated kids

*If you have egg allergy: you can get any type of flu vaccine and do not need any special precautions

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Step 2: What About Your Next Flu Vaccine Is Most Important to You:

Check ✓ how much each reason matters to you on a scale from 0 to 5. **'0'** means it is **not** important, **'5'** means is **very** important

Things that are important to you:

How important is it to not get the flu?	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
How important is it to get a flu vaccine each year if the choice is up to you?	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
How important is it to lower your risk of getting the flu, even just a bit?	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
How important is it to help protect others around you from the flu?	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
How important is it to avoid any side effects from a flu vaccine, even if mild?	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5

Step 3: What Matters Most to Me

Think about your options for this year's flu vaccine. What feels most right for you?

To help you decide, ask yourself:	Get a dose	Skip the dose
Which choice do I feel is safest for me or my child?	☐	☐
Which choice is most convenient?	☐	☐
Which choice am I most comfortable with?	☐	☐

Now check in with yourself:	Yes	No
Do I know enough about the benefits and side effects of each option?	☐	☐
Am I clear about which benefits and risks matter most to me?	☐	☐
Do I have enough support and advice from others to make a choice?	☐	☐
Do I feel sure about the best choice for me?	☐	☐

Step 4: Now That You Have Thought About Your Choices, What Would You Like to Do?

What are your goals for staying healthy this year?

What benefits do you think you would have if you get the flu vaccine this year?

What risks are you willing to take if you do not get the flu vaccine this year?

What risks are you willing to take if you did get the flu vaccine this year?

How do you hope your life will change based on this decision?

My questions and concerns:

My Decision: ☐ **Get Vaccinated** ☐ **Do Not Get Vaccinated**

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