Why get a flu vaccine?

Yearly flu vaccination is the best tool currently available to protect against influenza (flu), a serious disease which sickens millions of people each year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccination as the first and most important step in protecting against flu and its potentially serious complications. Millions of people have safely received flu vaccines for decades. Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctors' visits, and missed work and school due to flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations.

Reasons to get a flu vaccine:

- Flu vaccination can keep you from getting sick from flu.
- Flu vaccination can reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalization, including among children and older adults.
    - A 2014 study showed that flu vaccine reduced children's risk of flu-related pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) admission by 74% during flu seasons from 2010-2012
    - Another study published in the summer of 2016 showed that people 50 years and older who got a flu vaccine reduced their risk of getting hospitalized from flu by 57%.
- Flu vaccination is an important preventive tool for people with chronic health conditions.
    - Vaccination was associated with lower rates of some cardiac events among people with heart disease, especially among those who had a cardiac event in the past year.
    - Flu vaccination also has been shown to be associated with reduced hospitalizations among people with diabetes (79%) and chronic lung disease (52%).
- Vaccination helps protect women during and after pregnancy. Getting vaccinated also protects the developing baby during pregnancy and for several months after the baby is born.
    - A study that looked at flu vaccine effectiveness in pregnant women found that vaccination reduced the risk of flu-associated acute respiratory infection by about one half.
    - Another study found that babies of women who got a flu vaccine during their pregnancy were about one-third less likely to get sick with flu than babies in unvaccinated women. This protective benefit was observed for four months after birth.
- Flu vaccination also may make your illness milder if you do get sick.
- Getting vaccinated yourself also protects people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions.

How well do flu vaccines work?

Studies by CDC researchers and other experts indicate that flu vaccine reduces the risk of doctor visits due to flu by approximately 50% to 60% among the overall population when the vaccine viruses are like the ones spreading in the community. Other studies have shown similar protection against flu-related hospitalizations.

A flu vaccination does not guarantee protection against the flu. Some people who get vaccinated might still get sick. However, people who get a flu vaccine are less likely to get sick with flu or hospitalized from flu than someone who does not get vaccinated.

The most important factors that affect how well the flu vaccine works include:

- The "match" between the flu vaccine and the flu viruses that are spreading that season; and
- Factors such as the age and overall health of the person being vaccinated. For example, older people with weaker immune systems may respond less well to vaccination.

Experts are working to create flu vaccines that work better, but existing flu vaccines still offer important health benefits to the community.

The following is a list of all the health and age factors that are known to increase a person's risk of getting serious complications from the flu:

Asthma
Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
Extreme obesity (people with a body mass index [BMI] of 40 or greater)
Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)
Kidney disorders
Liver disorders
Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions
People younger than 19 years of age and on long-term aspirin therapy
Weakened immune system due to medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids)

Other people at high risk from the flu:

Adults 65 years and older
Children younger than 5 years old, but especially children younger than 2 years old
Pregnant women and women up to 2 weeks after the end of pregnancy
American Indians and Alaska Natives

It is especially important that these people get a flu vaccine and seek medical treatment quickly if they get flu symptoms.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu or call 800-CDC-INFO