

Five Flu Vaccine Myths ... Busted!

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The best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated every year. However, myths about the flu shot often cause people to skip it. For National Flu Vaccination Week (Dec. 4-8), here are five of the most common, and untrue, myths about the flu vaccine.

✗ Myth: Flu vaccines can cause the flu.

✓ Fact: Flu vaccines cannot cause the flu.

Flu vaccines are made with flu viruses that are either weakened, inactivated (killed), or recombinant (made without the virus), so they can't make you sick. It can take about two weeks for the flu vaccine to become effective, so it's possible for you to get sick during that period. Some people may have side effects like soreness, fatigue or even fever. These are common after a flu shot and should only last a couple of days.

✗ Myth: Healthy people don't need a flu vaccine.

✓ Fact: Anyone can get the flu, and anyone can spread it.

Getting a flu vaccine every year is important for everyone ages 6 months and older — even young, healthy people. Flu vaccinations are also the best way to prevent the spread of the flu virus to others who may be more likely to have serious complications from the flu.

✗ Myth: The flu isn't serious. It's just a bad cold.

✓ Fact: The flu can be dangerous or even deadly.

The flu can be much more serious than the common cold. It can lead to hospitalization and death, especially for people with weakened immune systems, older adults and infants. Even healthy people can have serious complications from the flu.

✗ Myth: If I didn't get the flu vaccine early in the season, it's too late to get it now.

✓ Fact: Getting vaccinated late is better than not getting vaccinated at all.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends getting vaccinated by the end of October to have the best chance at preventing the flu. However, as long as the flu is active, you should get vaccinated. Flu activity can last as late as May, so if you missed your flu vaccine in October, you can still benefit from getting it now.

✗ Myth: I had the vaccine and still got the flu, so the vaccine must not work.

✓ Fact: In rare cases, vaccinated people may get the flu. This can happen for a few reasons.

If you are exposed to the flu virus before getting your vaccine or during the two-week period after vaccination, it's possible that you could still develop the flu.

There can also be several different flu viruses going around at one time, so you could be exposed to a flu virus that wasn't included in the vaccine for that year. Scientists work hard to predict which flu viruses will be most active during the upcoming year, but sometimes you can be exposed to a different strain.

Studies show that vaccinated people who get sick with the flu tend to have milder symptoms than those who don't get a flu vaccine.

You can get a flu shot at your doctor's office, most pharmacies or your local health department, and most insurance plans cover the full cost. If you don't have health insurance, there are lots of ways to get free or low-cost flu shots:

- The Vaccines for Children Program provides free vaccines to children under 19 who are uninsured or underinsured.
- Most pharmacies will accept coupons for flu shots from sites like GoodRx.

UAMS Community Health & Research offers free flu shots to the public, regardless of insurance status. Visit nwa.uams.edu/chr to find out where their mobile health units will be next.

If you and your family need help finding a doctor, a Community Health Worker can help. Community Health Workers connect people to health services and can help you find a doctor who is a good fit for your family. Visit nwa.uams.edu/chr to get started. Or schedule an appointment today at one of our UAMS clinics in Northwest Arkansas at <https://uamshealth.com/northwest/primary-care/>.

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