



## Avoiding the Flu

By Lynn Harrelson, R.Ph., FASCP  
Senior Pharmacy Solutions  
Medication Therapy Management Services  
[www.SeniorPharmacySolutions.com](http://www.SeniorPharmacySolutions.com)

While the shot or flu vaccine may not always provide total protection, it often protects you from coming down with those debilitating flu symptoms---profound nausea, vomiting and diarrhea which are often accompanied by generalized aches and pains. The flu vaccine is generally offered, mid-fall to early winter before the start of flu season. It is important to get you vaccine early since it can take up to two weeks to build up your immunity following your flu shot.

Getting your flu shot is important since the "flu" can sicken millions of people each year and cause serious complications, especially in children and older adults. Especially at risk are those with diabetes, asthma, or other heart, lung or kidney diseases. Each year, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) develops a vaccine for the influenza strains that they believe will be the most problematic for the upcoming season. When the flu they anticipate is a good match for the one that develops, the benefits are very beneficial. Seniors not living in nursing home or those without chronic conditions great benefit. This group's hospitalization for flu or pneumonia is reduced by 30-70% when they get their flu shot. These seniors also benefit from a decreased risk of the other complications of the flu. Complications such as pneumonia, heat attack, and stroke.

A flu shot is needed each year because the flu virus changes from year to year. The flu "bugs" change so quickly that different strains can be seen at the end of the season that those seen at the beginning of the season.

In some cases, the flu shot can still result in you getting the flu, but it is usually a much less severe form of the illness. The vaccine contains viruses that are killed, these "killed viruses" cannot give you the flu. The vaccine instead causes your body to develop antibodies. Antibodies are your body's warriors against the flu. Antibiosis help you stay well but you need to allow them time to develop. A flu shot can also result in some muscle aches where you received the injection. This

discomfort usually lasts one or two days. Call your healthcare provider if the discomfort lasts longer.

The flu vaccine comes in two forms, only the shot, (the vaccine given with a needle), is widely recommended for seniors. The flu vaccine is more widely covered by insurance and often is provided free of charge to the uninsured.

Seniors should discuss flu vaccine with their healthcare providers. If you develop a fever, however slight, you need to delay your flu shot. You will also need to be evaluated if you have had an allergic reaction to an earlier flu vaccine. You should also tell your healthcare providers if you are allergic to eggs or if you have developed Guillain-Barre syndrome with 6 weeks of receiving the flu vaccine in a previous year.

The next best thing that you can do to help protect yourself from the flu and viruses is to practice good hygiene.

Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. This is especially important when you are in the public and handling things. Grocery cart handles, doorknobs, and elevator buttons---these are breeding grounds for all types of bugs. Computer keyboards and telephones are also "flu bug carriers".

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth whenever possible. Any bug you may have picked up more easily enters your systems after you have touched these areas.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw those tissues away; leaving them around only helps spread your germs to others.

If there is a flu outbreak, try to limit your exposure. Stay home, out of areas where lots of people gather. If the elevator is full, give yourself a break and wait for the next one. In confined areas, you are more likely to "breathe in" the bugs from others. During the flu outbreak, sometimes schools close due to the flu. Some healthcare providers cancel more routine visits. Avoid crowds when the flu is most prevalent in your area.

Should you get the flu, your best bet for treating flu symptoms remains the tried and true. Take plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest. For your aches and pains, take acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>®</sup>) or ibuprofen (Advil<sup>®</sup>, Motrin<sup>®</sup>).

The best medicine is and always has been is that ounce of prevention. Take care of yourself; keep the virus “bugs” away. Keep your defenses up; eat well, stay active in healthy environments and seriously consider the flu vaccine. The flu vaccines are often available at a number of community sites. Look for flu vaccine clinics in your community, senior or church newsletters. Get a head start for the healthier winter---get your flu vaccine early.

