

Influenza Prevention for 2015-2016 Season

While we all enjoy the warm summer weather and prepare for the return of the students, we should not forget that the first weeks of classes will inevitably be followed by the beginning of the new flu season. In this article you will find the answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about the flu.

When does the flu season start?

Ordinarily, seasonal flu in US begins in October and continues through May, peaking in December through February. However, the time frame, length and severity of each flu season fluctuates year to year as well as between different parts of the country. According to the [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu activity in the 2014-15 season increased through late November and December peaking in late December.

How serious is the flu?

Many people mistakenly consider flu a “minor” disease. However, while some people might see a relatively quick resolution of the illness, others develop complications as serious as pneumonia, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions. Per [CDC’s estimation](#), in the period between 1976-2007, an average of 6,309 influenza-associated annual deaths are reported in the category of underlying pneumonia and influenza causes, and an average 23,607 influenza-associated annual deaths reported in the category of underlying respiratory and circulatory causes. While the severity of flu in each individual is impossible to predict, populations most at risk for complications of the flu include the elderly, young children and those with medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cardiac disease, cancer, respiratory conditions, and others. During the 2014-15 flu season, the highest rate of flu-related hospitalizations was for people 65+ y.o. (266.1 cases per 100,000 population), followed by children 0-4 y.o. (47.8 cases per 100,000 population).

How can I protect myself from the flu?

The best way to protect yourself, your family, your coworkers and your community is to get a flu vaccine each year. In order to get protection before the flu season begins, it is recommended to obtain flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available. However, it is still strongly recommended to get flu vaccine later in the season if you did not receive it earlier.

Other important measures to prevent flu illness include avoiding contact with people sick with flu, washing hands often, and staying home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. If you have the flu and are very sick, you should call your doctor within 48 hours and ask about antiviral medications that may help treat the illness.

Why do I need to get vaccinated against flu every year?

Flu viruses change, or drift, every year. In order to match the strands of flu predominant in the new season, new flu vaccines are formulated every year. When you get flu vaccine, your immune system responds by producing antibodies specific to the viruses expected to circulate that year. Moreover, seasonal flu vaccines are found to also sometimes provide protection against other flu viruses. However,

this immune protection can decline over time. This, along with the genetic drift in flu viruses, is the reason it is important to get vaccinated against flu every year.

What strands of the flu will be addressed by 2015-16 flu vaccines?

There are two types of flu vaccines that will be available in 2015-16 season: trivalent and quadrivalent.

Trivalent vaccines available in the US will contain the following strands:

- an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like virus
- an A/Switzerland/9715293/2013 (H3N2)-like virus
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus

Quadrivalent flu vaccine will also contain an additional strand:

- a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus

Does flu vaccine give me the flu?

No. The intramuscular flu vaccine is not a live vaccine and cannot give you the flu. While the nasal flu vaccine is live, it is attenuated (weakened) so it will not give you the flu, either. In some cases, flu vaccine can cause side effects such as soreness at the site of injection, mild fever, headache, or general malaise because your immune system “thinks” that you have the flu and develop these symptoms in response. These symptoms are short in duration and will resolve. The majority of people do not experience any side effects at all!

I never get the flu, should I still get vaccinated?

Yes. Even though you have not suffered from the flu yet, you are at risk for getting the flu for as long as you are breathing. Remember – flu is a respiratory illness, it is contagious, and you may be exposed to it without knowing.

Where can I get a flu vaccine?

[BU Occupational Health Center](#) will be conducting free flu clinics for the university employees this coming fall and winter. Alternatively, flu vaccines can be obtained through your primary care doctor, at many pharmacies, and through some of the local Health and Human Services departments.

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