

Audience: Everyone 6 months and older
Word count: 644
CDC 2010-11 Flu Season

Flu Vaccine Now Recommended for Everyone

An annual flu vaccine is the best way to prevent the flu and flu-related complications that could lead to hospitalization or death. This season, health experts across the country are recommending that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine.

This “universal” flu vaccine recommendation was adopted by the CDC's Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP), an independent group of physicians and health advocates that sets recommendations for all adult and childhood immunizations in the United States.

Over the years, the number of people recommended for flu vaccination has grown as experts learned more about who was at highest risk for flu complications or who was bearing the greatest burden of illness and possibly playing a role in spreading flu in the community. Many experts have long argued that a universal vaccine recommendation would be the best way to protect the greatest numbers of people.

Moreover, the annual vaccine supply has grown recently, helping to ensure that enough vaccine is available for everyone who wishes to be vaccinated. Scientists and public health experts have continued to learn about the burden flu places on society and have come to recognize that while influenza is particularly dangerous for certain people, it can cause severe illness and even death for anyone, regardless of having high risk conditions. With the official universal vaccination recommendation, ACIP and the medical community are acknowledging the risk that everyone faces from the flu.

In fact, influenza is among the most common respiratory illnesses in the United States, infecting millions of people every flu season. Every year, flu spreads across the country, from person to person, family to family, and community to community. It can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death. Even healthy children and adults can get very sick from the flu and spread it to family and friends. Flu seasons are unpredictable and can be severe.

“One of the greatest challenges we face from the flu is the uncertainty of the disease, whether we are responding to a pandemic, as we did last season, or to a regular flu season,” explained Dr. Anne Schuchat, Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the CDC. “Flu viruses are constantly changing. Each flu season, different flu viruses can spread, and they can affect people differently based on their body’s ability to fight infection.”

Flu is unpredictable. Studies going back 30 years to 1976 show that annual seasonal flu-related deaths have ranged from about 3,000 people to 49,000 people. Each year, it’s estimated that more than 200,000 people are hospitalized because of flu-related complications.

How do you confront a public health threat that can send thousands of healthy adults and children in the United States to the doctor or hospital every year? And a threat that can be so unpredictable that it affects different people differently from one season to the next; hitting older adults harder one season, and the very young harder another? During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, scientists saw that people who are morbidly obese (Body Mass Index of 40 or greater) were at greater risk from serious complications related to infection with the new H1N1 virus. The same was seen among American Indians and Alaskan

natives. In addition, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic was a reminder that even people who are healthy can get a serious influenza illness and even die as a result.

So when you're out and about in your community and see signs offering flu shots, or when you visit your doctor for a routine check-up, remember: the flu ends with U.

Getting a flu vaccine is easy. It is available through your doctor, local health department, and even at many retail pharmacies. Many employers, schools, and colleges and universities also offer flu vaccinations.

For more information about the flu vaccine, go online to <http://www.flu.gov> or <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>.

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