

# SEASONAL FLU FACTS

## What is the flu?

The flu, or influenza, is a contagious viral infection that affects millions of people each year. It is unpleasant to have and places those with weak immune systems at high risk for serious complications such as pneumonia, heart attack and stroke. The normal flu season usually begins around October and can last until May.

Flu symptoms include:

- Fever.
- Headache.
- Extreme tiredness.
- Dry cough.
- Sore throat.
- Runny or stuffy nose.
- Muscle aches.
- Stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (especially in children).



## What is a flu shot?

The flu shot, or vaccine, is the single most effective way to protect yourself against the flu. October to November is the best time to get a flu shot, but it's OK to get it earlier or later. Since flu viruses change every year, it's important to get vaccinated annually.

A flu shot contains three inactive (dead) influenza viruses selected based on what is expected to hit during the flu season. About two weeks after getting the shot, your body develops antibodies that protect you against viruses contained in the vaccine. Since not every type of flu virus is contained in the vaccine, there is still a slight possibility of getting the flu.

Note that this year's flu shot does not protect against the novel H1N1 virus. See the next page for more information on novel H1N1.

## Who should get a seasonal flu shot?

Anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting seasonal flu, especially:

- Those at high risk for serious flu complications.
  - Children 6 months to 18 years old.
  - Adults age 50 and older.
  - Pregnant women.
  - People with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease.
  - People who live in nursing homes or long-term-care facilities.
- Household contacts of people who are at high risk.
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 6 months old.
- Health care workers, teachers, and others who could easily be exposed to the flu.

## Who should NOT get a seasonal flu shot?

- Those who are severely allergic to chicken eggs.
- People who developed Guillain-Barre syndrome within six weeks after getting a flu shot.
- Infants younger than 6 months.
- Those who have experienced a severe reaction to the flu shot in the past.
- People with a moderate to severe illness with a fever. (It's recommended they wait until symptoms lessen.)



## What are possible side effects of the flu shot?

Despite what many believe, the flu shot cannot give you the flu. Since the viruses are dead, they cannot infect you.

Possible side effects usually begin immediately after the shot and last one to two days. They include:

- A low fever.
- Aches.
- Soreness, redness or swelling in the area where shot was given.



Note: These side effects do not apply to LAIV (Flu Mist®).

## Seasonal flu vs. novel H1N1 flu virus – what you need to know

The novel H1N1 virus, also known as the swine flu, became a worldwide pandemic in 2009.

Since the novel H1N1 virus is a relatively new infection, it could not be included in the seasonal flu vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working hard to monitor the development and distribution of a novel H1N1 vaccine, but it is still unknown how widely available the vaccine will be.

Symptoms of the seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu are similar, but the risk groups are not.

## Who is at high risk for the novel H1N1 virus?

Unlike the seasonal flu, the novel H1N1 flu has been infecting a higher rate of pregnant women, young children, and those between the ages of 6 months and 24 years. The infection rate is the lowest in people 65 years and older.

## When the novel H1N1 vaccine becomes available, who should be vaccinated?

Since there will be high demand for the novel H1N1 vaccine when it is first introduced, it's most important for the following groups of people to be vaccinated:

- Pregnant women.
- People who live with or care for infants younger than 6 months.
- Health care and emergency services workers.
- Children between the ages of 6 months and 4 years.
- Children between the ages of 5 and 18 with chronic medical conditions.

Once the above groups of people receive the novel H1N1 vaccine, these groups should be next in line:

- People between the ages of 18 and 24.
- People between the ages of 25 and 64 with weakened immune systems or chronic health disorders.

It's important to know that the novel H1N1 vaccine is not meant to replace the seasonal flu vaccine, or vice versa. However, the CDC has determined that both vaccines can be administered on the same day.

To help prevent the spread of viruses and reduce your chances of getting the flu, take proper precautions to stay healthy:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home and limit your contact with others if you are feeling sick.



HMSA's flu shot clinic  
schedule is inside!

Keep your  
**OHANA HEALTHY**  
this **FLU** season  
– get vaccinated!



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