

Influenza vaccines

Influenza is the “true flu”. It is caused by the influenza virus, which spreads from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Other illnesses have the same symptoms and are often mistaken for influenza. But only the influenza virus can cause influenza. Anyone can get influenza. It can last for a few days to over a week. It can cause:

- fever
- sore throat
- chills
- fatigue
- cough
- headache
- muscle aches

Some people get much sicker. Influenza can lead to pneumonia and can be dangerous for people with heart or breathing conditions. It can cause high fever and seizures in children. Influenza kills about 36,000 people each year in the United States, mostly among the elderly.

The injectable killed virus vaccine can be given starting at 6 months of age. The nasal spray vaccine, which uses a tame live virus, can be given from 2 to 50 years of age, but should not be given to people with certain health conditions such as asthma or diabetes. Because the flu viruses change each year, a new vaccine is needed each year. It becomes available in October. Children younger than 9 years should receive two doses, a month apart, when they first get the vaccine.