Immunizations

Should You Get the Flu Shot or Nasal Spray Vaccine?

Do you hate shots — but want to be protected from the flu? Consider the nasal spray vaccine.

Influenza (flu) is a common, contagious disease that kills thousands of people each year. Getting a flu shot each fall can help prevent flu. But some people would rather risk getting sick than get a shot.

If you hate shots, but want flu protection, you may have another choice. The flu vaccine is also available as a nasal spray.

How is the nasal spray vaccine different from the flu shot?
Both types of vaccine are good at preventing the flu, but they do have some differences.

How they are given

- The flu shot is given as an injection, usually in the upper arm.
- The nasal spray vaccine is sprayed into the nostrils.
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Who can use them

• The flu shot is an option for almost anyone older than 6 months, including people with chronic diseases.

• The nasal spray vaccine is an option for healthy people between the ages of 2 and 49 who aren’t pregnant and don’t have certain health conditions (see below).

Risk of contracting flu from these vaccines

• The flu shot is made with killed (inactivated) flu viruses, so there is no risk of getting the flu from it.

• The nasal spray vaccine is made from live viruses, but weakened (attenuated). Because they are so weak, they do not cause the flu. But they can cause mild symptoms such as a runny nose, cough and headache.

Side effects

• The flu shot may cause soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given, a slight fever and aches.

• In children, the nasal spray vaccine may cause a runny nose, headache, vomiting, wheezing, aches and a slight fever. In adults, it may cause a runny nose, headache, sore throat and cough.

With both types of vaccine, serious side effects are very rare.

Who should not get the nasal spray vaccine?
The nasal spray vaccine is not recommended for:

• Adults 50 and older because it has not been proven effective in this age group.

• Children younger than 6 months should not get either flu vaccine.

• Children 6 months through 23 months of age because of an increased risk of wheezing. They should only receive the flu shot.

• Children younger than 5 who have asthma or have had one or more episodes of wheezing in the past year.

• Teens or children taking aspirin long term.

• People who have certain chronic health problems such as heart or lung disease, asthma, diabetes anemia or kidney failure.

• Anyone who has a muscle or nerve disorder (such as Guillain–Barré Syndrome or seizures) that could cause breathing or swallowing problems.

• Anyone who has a weakened immune system.

• Pregnant women.

• Anyone in close contact with someone with a severely-weakened immune system who requires a protected environment for care (such as a bone marrow transplant unit).

People who have a nasal condition that makes breathing difficult should get a flu shot instead the nasal spray. Most people who can’t use the nasal spray vaccine can get a flu shot.

People who are moderately or severely ill should wait until they recover before getting flu vaccine. People with mild illness can usually get the vaccine.
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Some people need to talk to their doctor before getting either type of vaccine. These include:

• People who have had severe, life-threatening allergies (although allergic reactions to influenza vaccine is rare).
• People who have a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), a severe paralytic illness.
• People who have had any other vaccines in the past 4 weeks.

Certain people may be recommended to not receive the flu vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies, including a severe allergy to eggs. If you have a severe allergy to any component of the flu vaccine this may be a reason to not receive the vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have ever had a severe reaction after a dose of influenza vaccine.

How can I decide if the nasal spray vaccine is right for me or my child?

Talk to your doctor. He or she can answer any questions you have and help you decide if the nasal spray vaccine is a good choice.

When should I get the vaccine?

The ideal time to get the flu vaccine is as soon as the vaccine becomes available. The flu season can begin as early as October, so the sooner the better. But it is still OK to get the flu vaccine anytime during the flu season, which can run from October through May. Protection develops about 2 weeks after you get vaccinated and may last up to a year.

Most people only need one dose of vaccine each year. Children younger than 9 who are getting the vaccine for the first time need two doses, given at least 1 month apart.

SOURCES:
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The nasal-spray flu vaccine (live attenuated influenza vaccine [LAIV]). Accessed: 01/02/2013
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What you should know for the 2012-2013 influenza season. Accessed: 01/02/2013
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Is the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine Right for Your Child?

The cervical cancer vaccine protects against HPV strains that cause most cervical cancer.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States. HPV causes nearly all cervical cancer.

To be most effective, the HPV vaccine should be given before a person becomes sexually active and possibly exposed to HPV. The vaccine should be given at ages 11 or 12. It is now one of the childhood immunizations recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Cancer Society and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What is HPV?

More than half of all sexually active men and women are infected with HPV at some time in their lives. People often don’t know they have HPV as it seldom has symptoms. Certain types of HPV cause genital warts in women and men. Other types can cause cervical cancer in women and other cancers in the genital and throat areas in women and men.
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Is the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine Right for Your Child (continued)

What vaccines are available?
The two HPV vaccines available in the United States are Cervarix and Gardasil. Both have proven effective against the HPV types that cause most cervical cancers. They’ve also been shown to prevent cervical precancers.

Gardasil has some differences. It also protects against HPV types that cause most genital warts in males and females, and is tested and available for use in males ages 9 through 26. Gardasil has been shown to protect against precancers of the vulva, vagina and anus.

Who should get the vaccine?
The CDC recommends the vaccine for:

• All girls 11 to 12 years of age, but it may be given as early as age 9

• Girls and women age 13 through 26 who have not been vaccinated or didn’t complete the full series of shots

All boys aged 11 or 12 years, and males aged 13 through 21 who have not been vaccinated or didn’t get the full series of shots should also be vaccinated. Only Gardasil is used to vaccinate males.

Who should not get the vaccine?
Some people should not get the Cervarix or Gardasil vaccine. Or they should wait. Here are recommendations from the CDC:

Anyone who is moderate or severely ill should wait. Those who are mildly ill when an HPV dose is planned can get the vaccine.

Anyone who has had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a component or dose of the HPV vaccine should not get it. If you are getting the Cervarix vaccine, tell your doctor if you have severe allergies, including latex allergies. If you are getting the Gardasil vaccine, tell your doctor if you have any severe yeast allergies.

The HPV vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. Nursing moms may get the vaccine.

How is the vaccine given?
Three doses (shots) are recommended over six months, with the second dose given one to two months after the first, and the third dose given six months after the first.

What are the side effects?
The most common ones are slight pain and swelling at the injection site, headache, upset stomach and a low fever. Serious side effects are rare.

Is a Pap test still necessary?
Yes. The HPV vaccines protect against the most common strains of the virus. However, they do not protect against every type of HPV that causes cervical cancer. So even if you’ve been vaccinated, it’s still important for you to get Pap tests to find cell changes that could become cancer.

SOURCES:
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Decision Focus: Flu Shot for Flu Season

Flu shots. Some years you’ve been strict about getting the whole family in for a seasonal flu vaccination (flu shot). Other years, maybe not so much.

Don’t let flu shots slide down your priority list this year. Planning your family’s flu shots, including ones for grandma and grandpa, may be one of the most important tasks you do all year.

When should I get the flu shot?
Get the flu shot as soon as it becomes available, which is generally in the early fall. The flu seasons are unpredictable and it takes about two weeks after the flu shot for your body to become fully protected.

Who should get the flu shot?
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone 6 months of age and older get the flu shot each year. Some kids may need two doses of the vaccine for it to work. Kids between 6 months and 8 years old who didn’t receive at least one dose during the 2011-2012 flu season need two doses of the flu shot. The shots are given about 1 month apart.

A higher-dose flu vaccine is available for people over age 65. Talk to your doctor to learn more about this option. The intradermal vaccine is available in some areas for people age 18-64. A nasal-spray flu vaccine is an option for healthy people 2-49 years of age who are not pregnant.

Is the H1N1 (swine flu) shot different from the seasonal flu shot?
No. This year, one vaccine will protect you from both H1N1 (swine) and seasonal varieties of flu.

Why should I get the flu vaccine?
• It protects you and your family from the three types of the flu virus. Every year, at least 1 in 20 and as many as 1 in 5 people get the flu.
• The vaccine can protect you and your family from serious problems caused by the flu. More than 200,000 people a year are hospitalized because of flu-related issues.
• Being protected will give you peace of mind.

Avoiding the seasonal flu may also mean you’ll be in overall better health. That will make you better able to fend off disease through the flu season.
Why shouldn’t I get vaccinated?
The flu shot is safe for most people. But, if you have a severe allergy to chicken eggs or have had a severe reaction to the flu shot in the past, check with your doctor to see if the flu shot is safe for you.

Personal concerns and beliefs
Some people are concerned about vaccine safety. Vaccines, like any medication, can cause side effects, which may occasionally be serious. Other folks may have religious beliefs that conflict with getting vaccinations.

Before you make a decision, weigh the risks and benefits with your doctor. Not getting immunized puts you at risk of getting a disease that could, in rare cases, be fatal. It also raises the risk that you can spread the virus to others who may be at high risk for complications.

Another vaccination to consider
People are at increased risk of getting pneumonia when they get the flu or are otherwise sick. One type of bacterium called pneumococcus can result in pneumococcal pneumonia. A vaccine can guard against this bacterium. The CDC recommends the following people get the appropriate pneumococcal vaccine:

• All children under 5 years of age.
• People age 65 or older.
• Anyone 2–64 years of age who has problems with their lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, has a chronic condition or takes drugs that lower their body’s ability to fight infection.
• People living in nursing homes or long-term care centers.
• People 19–64 years of age who smoke or have asthma.