

SEASONAL INFLUENZA (FLU) VACCINE - 2020-2021

QUESTION & ANSWER BROCHURE

Why should people get vaccinated against the Flu?

Influenza (“flu”) is a contagious disease. It is caused by the influenza virus, which can be spread by coughing, sneezing or nasal secretions. Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, symptoms last only a few days. They include fever, sore throat, chills, fatigue, cough, headache, and muscle aches. Other illnesses can have the same symptoms and are often mistaken for influenza. An annual flu vaccine is the best way to reduce the chances that you will get flu and lessen the chance that you will transmit it to others.

Will the 2020-2021 flu vaccine protect against H1N1?

Yes. The 2020-2021 flu vaccine includes protection against the 2009 H1N1 flu virus, influenza A (H3N2) and influenza B.

Will the 2020-2021 flu vaccine protect against COVID-19?

No, the 2020-2021 flu vaccine is not meant to protect against COVID-19.

Who should get vaccinated?

All persons, 6 months of age and older should get the flu vaccine. It is especially important for people who are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or people who live with or care for them. High risk persons include:

- Young children 6 months to 4 years of age, but especially those under 2 years.
- Persons receiving long-term aspirin therapy.
- Pregnant women (may protect baby from birth to 6 months)
- People 50 years of age and older.
- Persons with weakened immune systems and those with chronic medical conditions such as heart, kidney and lung diseases and diabetes.
- Morbidly obese persons (BMI of 40 or greater).
- People living in nursing homes and other long term care facilities.
- Persons with neurological disorders.
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, e.g.:
 - Health care workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
- Household contacts and out of

home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

Who should not get vaccinated, or wait?

The following persons should not be vaccinated without first consulting their physician:

- People who have had convulsions one year before vaccination.
- People who have severe allergy to chicken, chicken eggs or chicken components.
- People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccine in the past.
- People who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine. People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated.
- Nursing mothers should inform their doctor or nurse that they are breastfeeding before taking the flu vaccine.

What kind of flu vaccine is available?

The “flu vaccine” is administered in the Cayman Islands by injection, usually in the arm. The vaccine is approved for use among people 6 months of age or older, including healthy people and those with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, kidney, or heart disease.

How does the flu vaccine work?

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body. These antibodies provide protection against infection from the viruses that are in the vaccine. It takes up to 2 weeks for the protection to develop after receiving the vaccine. Protection lasts about one year.

When should I get vaccinated?

The H.S.A recommends that people get their seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available. Vaccination before December is best since this timing ensures that protective antibodies are in place before flu activity is typically at its highest.

Once you get vaccinated, your body makes protective antibodies in about two weeks. However, children aged 6 months to 8 years who are being vaccinated for the first time need a second dose 4 weeks later in order to be fully protected.

Does flu vaccine work right away?

No. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. However, children aged 6 months to 8 years who are being vaccinated for the first time, need a second dose 4 weeks later in order to be protected. In the meantime, you are still at risk for getting the flu. That is why it's better to get vaccinated early before the flu season really gets underway.

Can I get the flu even though I got a flu vaccine? Yes.

- People may be exposed to an influenza virus shortly before getting vaccinated or during the two-week period that it takes the body to gain protection after getting vaccinated. This exposure may result in a person becoming ill with flu before the vaccine begins to protect them.
- People may become ill from other (non-flu) viruses that circulate during the flu season, which can also cause flu-like symptoms (such as rhinovirus).
- A person may be exposed to an influenza virus that is not included in the seasonal flu vaccine as there are many different influenza viruses.
- Unfortunately, some people can remain unprotected from flu despite getting the vaccine. This is more likely to occur among people that have a weakened immune system but the flu vaccine can still help prevent influenza complications in such persons.

Why do I need to get vaccinated against the Flu every year?

The immunity (natural protection that develops against a disease after a person has had that disease) that is built up from having the flu caused by one virus strain doesn't always provide protection when a new strain is circulating. Secondly, a vaccine made against flu viruses circulating last year may not protect against the newer viruses. That is why the influenza vaccine is updated to include current viruses every year.

Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?

No, a flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. The viruses contained in flu vaccines are inactivated (killed), which means they cannot cause infection.

What are the risks of getting a flu shot?

The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu. The risk of a flu vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small. However, a vaccine, like any medicine, may rarely cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. Almost all people who get influenza vaccine have no serious problems from it.

What are the side effects that could occur?

Common problems: **Soreness**, redness, **hardness** or **swelling** where the vaccine was given, **headache**, **weakness**, fever, and aches. If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the vaccine and last 1-2 days.

Uncommon and Rare problems: Itching, hives, rash, convulsions, encephalomyelitis (inflammation of brain & spinal cord) and Guillain-Barré syndrome (1-2 cases per million people vaccinated). Life-threatening allergic reactions from vaccines are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccine.

What should I do if I have an uncommon or rare side effect to the vaccine?

- Seek medical attention right away.
- Tell your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when you got the flu shot.

Where can I get the flu shot?

- The General Practice Clinic at the Cayman Islands Hospital and all District Health Centres, from 2pm - 4pm Monday through Friday.
- Faith Hospital in Cayman Brac: Residents should contact Faith Hospital to make arrangements.
- The Little Cayman Clinic - Residents of Little Cayman should contact the clinic to make arrangements.

For more information

Please contact the Public Health Clinic at 244-2648 / 244-2889 or your District Health Centre or your Healthcare Provider

