Flu Vaccination

Protect yourself.
Annual vaccination for people over 60.
The flu is a much more serious disease than the common cold. Flu caused by influenza viruses lasts at least five to seven days in straightforward cases and is accompanied by significantly more severe symptoms.

**Flu is not a cold**

What is actually seasonal flu and what is a cold? Even if the symptoms are similar at first glance, and we might use ‘flu’ in everyday language to describe a head cold, flu (influenza) and the common cold (a head cold, sniffles, flu-like infection) are completely different illnesses.

**Typical flu symptoms:**
- Sudden onset of illness with fever (≥ 38.5 °C)
- Irritating dry cough
- Headache, sore throat, aching muscles and limbs
- Fatigue, sometimes accompanied by nausea/vomiting

A flu infection may cause complications, such as pneumonia or myocarditis. If these kinds of symptoms occur, you should see your doctor immediately.
You should see your doctor even if you have been vaccinated, as a vaccination can have a limited effect — for instance, as a result of a weakened immune system.

**Well-prepared for the flu season**

As a person grows older, their immune system becomes less efficient. In addition, existing illnesses such as diabetes or cardiovascular problems can make it harder for the person to resist or recover from the effects of infectious diseases.

This means that an older person’s immune system often struggles to fight off an infection. As a consequence, they are at risk of suffering from a seasonal flu (influenza) that takes a more severe course, lasts longer or can be accompanied by severe, even life-threatening complications, such as pneumonia.

For this reason, it is especially important that older people or people with chronic illnesses are vaccinated every year against seasonal flu.
While vaccination offers no protection against the common cold, it can stop people getting a bout of flu, which typically involves more severe symptoms.

At the same time, these groups of people should also check their pneumococcal vaccine status. This is because pneumococci are frequently the cause of bacterial pneumonia. Since 2018, the German Permanent Commission on Immunisation (STIKO) has also recommended vaccination against shingles for all persons aged 60 and over.

A tried-and-tested approach that’s always up-to-date: vaccination

Vaccines against seasonal flu have existed for many years. They have been tested in numerous studies, and their effectiveness has been proven in millions of cases. As the flu virus can easily mutate, the vaccine is adapted every year to obtain the best possible protection.

Flu vaccines offer protection against several different types of flu that are likely to be active in the coming ‘flu season’. Trivalent vaccines offer protection against three types and quadrivalent vaccines protect against four. Quadrivalent vaccines offer greater protection in seasons where flu virus strains circulate that are not found in the trivalent vaccine. STIKO has recommended vaccination with a quadrivalent vaccine since 2018.
Important! A flu vaccination cannot give you a bout of flu. The vaccine does not contain any live flu viruses.

GOOD TO KNOW
A flu vaccine offers no protection against the common cold.

Side effects? Virtually none!
The flu vaccine is well tolerated. Since the vaccine stimulates the body’s natural defences, reddening or swelling at the site of the injection can occur in some cases and this area may be slightly painful or sensitive.

Other possible side effects are an increase in body temperature and mild general discomfort, such as a feeling of nausea. However, these symptoms subside after one to two days.

Serious side effects, such as a rash or immediate allergic reaction, only occur in extremely rare cases.
How to get vaccinated

When?

Ideally, in good time before the flu season starts in October or November, as it takes two weeks for the body's immune protection to become fully active. If you have missed this period, it is still a good idea to get a vaccination at a later date.

Get vaccinated once a year!

A single vaccination offers enough protection for an entire flu season. You must renew your vaccination every year to ensure you have protection during the next flu season.

In cases of acute illnesses requiring treatment, the vaccination should be administered two weeks after recovery at the earliest.

Where?

Flu vaccinations are generally given in general medical, internal medical or women's health practices. However, some health authorities or employers also offer this vaccination.

What does it cost?

Health insurance companies bear the cost of flu vaccinations for all people over the age of 60.

A mild infection with a fever under 38.5°C is not a reason to avoid a flu vaccination.
Always useful: practising good hygiene

Flu viruses are very infectious. Vaccination against flu offers the most effective form of protection. You can also lower the risk of infection with some simple hygiene precautions. In this way, you can not only protect yourself and your loved ones from flu infections but also from other infectious diseases (such as gastrointestinal infections).

Hygiene tips

- Wash your hands several times a day with soap, always after going to the toilet, when coming in from outdoors, and before preparing meals and eating.

- Do not cough and sneeze into your hands. Instead, use the crook of your arm or a tissue.

- Use paper tissues and dispose of them after using them once.

- People with flu should not get any closer than about a metre away from people who are at increased risk.
Who should be vaccinated against flu?

The German Permanent Commission on Immunisation (STIKO) recommends vaccination against flu for the following groups of people in particular:

- People aged 60 years or older
- Residents of retirement homes or nursing homes
- Children, adolescents and adults with an increased risk to their health as a result of an underlying illness, such as:
  - Chronic respiratory disorders
  - Heart or cardiovascular disorders
  - Liver or kidney disorders
  - Metabolic disorders, such as diabetes
  - Chronic neurological diseases, such as multiple sclerosis
  - Congenital or acquired immune deficiencies
  - HIV
- Pregnant women
- Medical staff
- Personnel in facilities that have frequent contact with the general public
- People who present a potential source of infection for members of risk groups in their care
You can find further information
on the following websites:
► www.impfen-info.de/grippe
► www.infektionsschutz.de
► www.rki.de/influenza-impfung

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