Flu Vaccination

Protect yourself.
Yearly vaccinations for people with chronic illnesses.

Heart disease?
Asthma?
Diabetes?
Immune deficiency?
Multiple sclerosis?
We’ll get there before the flu does

It is especially important for adults and children with chronic illnesses to protect themselves in good time before the next flu season with a flu vaccination. They are at an especially high risk of a flu infection becoming serious or even life-threatening, especially if the respiratory or immune systems are damaged by the underlying illness. This applies to both young and older people.

Flu is not a cold!

The symptoms may seem similar at first glance, and common colds are often mistakenly called ‘flu’ in everyday language, but flu is a much more serious illness than a cold. Flu is caused by the influenza virus, lasts at least five to seven days in straightforward cases, and is accompanied by clearly more serious signs of illness.
The flu can even cause serious complications, such as pneumonia or myocarditis.

**Suspect the flu? What should you do?**

Antiviral therapy can be considered if a flu infection is suspected to have become more serious, or if there is an increased risk of a flu infection becoming more serious, e.g. if there are any underlying diseases. Therapy with antiviral medication should be started as early as possible, i.e. ideally within 48 hours of the first symptoms occurring. Please see your doctor immediately if you suspect you have the flu.

**Typical flu symptoms are:**

- Sudden onset of illness with fever (≥ 38.5°C)
- Irritating dry cough
- Headache, sore throat, aching muscles and limbs
- Fatigue, often accompanied by nausea/vomiting
Who should be vaccinated against flu?

The Commission for Regular Vaccinations (Ständige Impfkommission, or STIKO) recommends vaccination against flu especially for people who are at an increased risk of severe illness or complications from being infected with the flu virus.

This includes children, teenagers and adults with underlying illness, such as:

- Chronic respiratory disorders (including asthma and COPD)
- Heart or cardiovascular disorders
- Liver or kidney disorders
- Metabolic disorders, such as diabetes
- Chronic neurological disorders, such as multiple sclerosis
- Congenital or acquired immune deficiencies
- HIV

Yearly flu vaccinations are also recommended for the following risk groups, amongst others:

- People aged 60 or older
- Residents of old people’s homes or care homes
- Pregnant women
- Personnel in organisations with frequent contact with the public
- Medical staff
- People who present a potential source of infection to members of risk groups under their care
An established method still in use today: vaccination

There have been vaccines for seasonal flu for many years. Apart from inactivated vaccines against flu, a live vaccine for children aged 2 to their 17th birthday has been approved in Germany since 2012, which is administered as a nasal spray. The vaccines have been tested in numerous studies: they have few side-effects and have proved themselves a million times over.

All for one and one for all: together we must protect ourselves against flu!

Relatives and people in close contact with people suffering from chronic illness should be vaccinated to protect themselves from being infected with flu.
As the flu virus can slightly mutate, the vaccines are adapted every year to provide the best possible protection. So-called trivalent vaccines protect against the three strains of the virus, which are the most common strains expected to spread in the coming flu season. Quadrivalent vaccines offer greater protection in flu seasons where strains of influenza viruses circulate that are not present in the trivalent vaccine. The German Permanent Commission on Immunisation (STIKO) has therefore recommended the use of a quadrivalent vaccine since 2018.

**Well tolerated, few side effects**

The flu vaccine is generally well tolerated. Reddening or swelling at the site of the injection can occasionally occur and may also be a little painful due to the body's natural defences being stimulated. Other possible side effects are an increase in body temperature and mild, general discomfort, such as a feeling of nausea. A flu vaccination with an inactivated vaccine cannot induce an onset of flu. The vaccine does not contain any fertile pathogens. This means that people with a weakened immune defence system can also be vaccinated. However, it should be taken into consideration that a more
severe immune reaction can arise after vaccination as a result of a weak immune system. The most frequently observed side effect from a vaccination with a living vaccine is nasal congestion. A general feeling of uneasiness, fever, loss of appetite, headache and muscle aches can also occur. However, these complaints generally subside after a few days.

**Discussing vaccination beforehand can help with your decision**

It is especially important to discuss vaccination with your doctor if you have a chronic illness or a weakened immune system. For example, if you are undergoing chemotherapy for cancer, one deciding factor can be choosing the right time for a flu vaccination to ensure optimum protection for your body. A more severe immune reaction can occur after a vaccination as a result of immune system weaknesses caused by illness.

Please consult your doctor for advice!
What are some important points to consider?

A minor infection with fever below 38.5°C is not a reason to avoid a flu vaccination. People with acute illnesses requiring treatment should be vaccinated two weeks after recovery at the earliest.

Real obstacles to vaccination can include intolerability to constituents of the vaccine. In the event of a medically diagnosed severe allergy to chicken protein, which is very rare, vaccination should only be given in an environment in which clinical monitoring and treatment is possible after vaccination. Please speak to your doctor about this.

People with weakened immune systems may not be given the live vaccine. It is also important to consider that the live vaccine should not be used in instances of certain underlying illnesses (e.g. severe asthma) and some medical therapies.
People who have been vaccinated with the live vaccine should also avoid contact with people with severely weakened immune systems in the first one to two weeks after vaccination. There is a theoretical risk of the virus being transmitted to people with severely weakened immune systems. However, no reports on such transmissions have been found as yet in scientific literature.

**Avoid infection**

With infectious illnesses, the risk of infection must be kept as low as possible. It is easier to break infection chains when the relevant methods of transmission are known. If flu occurs in a household or workplace, it is important to ensure that people who are especially at risk (e.g. infants, older people, patients with weakened immune defences, people with chronic illnesses) have as little contact as possible with infected people to prevent the flu virus from being transmitted.

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**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 measures.
Hygiene protection

By observing some hygiene rules, you can protect yourself and your loved ones from flu infections but also from further infectious illnesses (for example, gastrointestinal infections).

Wash your hands several times a day with soap, always after going to the toilet, when coming in from outside, and before preparing meals and eating. Do not cough and sneeze into your hands; instead, use the crook of your arm or a paper tissue that can be disposed of after being used once.

It is also important to touch your face as little as possible. The reason for this is that if pathogens stick to your hands, they can find their way into the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose or eyes, and infiltrate the body.
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.

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 is the cost?
Health insurance companies bear the cost of flu vaccinations for people for whom vaccination is recommended by the Permanent Vaccination Commission (STIKO) in Germany.

Get vaccinated once a year!
Vaccination offers protection for an entire flu season. You must be newly vaccinated every year to protect yourself from the current flu season.
Further information

- www.impfen-info.de/grippe
- www.infektionsschutz.de
- www.rki.de/impfen

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