

Q&A about Flu Vaccination

Should I get a flu vaccination?

Only you can answer that question. However, it is important to look at both the risks and benefits. It is highly recommended that you get the flu shot because it will protect you, your family, and the people you serve from getting the flu. Flu is a serious disease that kills about 450 Oregonians a year. Most people recover but it frequently makes you sick for a week to 10 days, with the cough and fatigue lasting longer.

Do I have to get a shot to be vaccinated?

No, there are two forms of the vaccine: a shot and a nasal spray. The shot is made from a killed virus, while the nasal spray is made from a live, attenuated virus (meaning that the virus has been changed and is no longer capable of giving you the flu). People over 50 years old, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions and young children under the age of 2 are not eligible for the nasal spray. Talk to either your doctor or the person providing the vaccine about which one is better for you.

Is the H1N1 shot safe?

The H1N1 shot should be as safe as the common seasonal flu shot. Each year three different strains are chosen to be included in the seasonal flu shot. This year when those three were chosen, H1N1 was not known. The H1N1 shot is just an additional fourth flu strain. H1N1 vaccine is made in the same way as the regular annual flu vaccine. In addition, the testing has not shown any unusual side-effects.

Can I get the flu from the shot?

No, the shot has pieces of the killed virus. The shot doesn't include any live virus. You may have a sore arm and feel somewhat crummy after the shot but that is caused by your immune system being "turned on" so it can fight the flu virus if you come into contact with it. You could mistake your body's reaction as a mild case of the flu.

The nasal spray (FluMist) does contain live virus but it has been changed so that it also can't cause a flu infection.

I have had the flu vaccine and still got the flu. Why is that?

First off, you may have been confused by other infections. The flu vaccine only prevents influenza, an illness with cough, sore throat, usually fever,

body aches, and for some diarrhea and vomiting. Influenza is not the 24-hour illness of vomiting and diarrhea that our mothers called the “stomach flu”. The vaccination also won’t prevent colds and other viruses.

It is also possible to catch a strain of flu that wasn’t chosen for the vaccine. Every year health officials make their best guess of what flu will circulate next year. Some years their guess wasn’t the best. It is also possible to have been exposed to the flu, get the shot, and not have had enough time for your body to develop immunity from the shot.

Who shouldn’t get the flu shot?

There are very small numbers of people who should not get the flu shot. Everyone should talk to their doctor or the nurse who gives the vaccination. Basically people who are allergic to eggs and those who have had a bad reaction to a previous flu shot should not get the standard flu shot. There will be limited flu vaccine available that was not grown in eggs. Those who can get the nasal spray are more limited. Again, talk to your health care provider.

Can getting the regular flu shot make the H1N1 illness worse or can getting the H1N1 vaccination make the seasonal flu worse?

No, getting one vaccination will not prevent the other type of flu and it won’t make it worse.

Can I get both shots at once?

Both can be given at once if both vaccines are available at the same time. However, since the vaccines are distributed in a different manner and paid for differently, both may not be available together. It’s recommended that the nasal pandemic H1N1 vaccine, and the nasal seasonal vaccine not be given at the same time.

Will it cost me anything to get the H1N1 vaccine?

The US government has purchased all of the H1N1 vaccine that will be used in the country. Because it is funded by taxpayers, there is no charge for the vaccine itself. However, there may be an administration fee (usually \$15 or less), depending upon where you get the vaccination.