

# THE FLU SHOT:

**The best thing  
you can do  
to head off the flu.**

**The annual flu season begins in October and can continue until May.**

Every year, between 5 percent and 20 percent of the U.S. population gets the flu. That means at least 15 million Americans (and as many as 60 million) get sick from the flu every year, with more than 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths annually.

So, what can you do to protect yourself and your family from seasonal flu? Get a flu shot. October and November are the best months to get vaccinated, but the flu is still circulating in January and February, and sometimes even as late as May. The seasonal flu shot won't protect you from H5N1, the type of avian influenza that has killed birds and people in countries such as Indonesia and Thailand, but it can protect you from regular flu.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that certain people, including very young children, the elderly and people living with illnesses that affect the immune system get vaccinated against the flu. For a complete list of those who are most at risk, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm).

Sometimes people are afraid to get a flu shot because of fears that it will make them sick, but the seasonal flu shot contains dead influenza virus, which experts call “inactive virus.” You can’t get sick from it because the virus is no longer alive. This vaccine, given with a needle, is approved for people older than 6 months of age. If you are allergic to eggs, contact your health care provider, as the flu vaccine will have to be administered differently, if at all.

Beyond the shot, there is a newer flu vaccine introduced recently that is given via a nasal spray. It is only recommended for healthy people between 5 and 49 years of age who are not pregnant, since it contains live (but weakened) flu virus. The spray is a great alternative to needles, especially for healthy, school-aged children.

**Whichever type you choose, vaccination is the best thing you can do to head off the flu.**

