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Wissen, was schützt.

Flu Vaccination

Protect yourself.

Yearly vaccinations for people with chronic illnesses.





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.

Flu is an infection that needs to be taken seriously

A proper flu (influenza) infection is not a simple cold but an illness that needs to be taken seriously. The illness typically starts with the sudden onset of a high fever and is accompanied by feeling very unwell, a dry cough and bad headache and aches and pains in muscles and limbs.

Typical symptoms of flu include:

- sudden onset of illness with fever ($\geq 38.5\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$)
- dry, tickly cough
- headache, sore throat, aches and pains in muscles and limbs
- fatigue and sometimes nausea/vomiting
- sweats

These typical symptoms occur in about one third of cases.

The flu leads to inflammatory processes in the body. There is evidence that this can increase the chances of a heart attack or stroke if various risk factors are present. This risk as a result of influenza can be reduced by the flu vaccination.

Suspect the flu? What should you do?

Where there is a higher risk of serious illness, such as due to underlying conditions, treatment using so-called antiviral medication – which inhibits replication of the viruses and helps to eradicate them – may be considered. This kind of therapy should be started as early on as possible, ideally within 48 hours of symptoms arising. In suspected cases you should see your GP as soon as possible.

Who should get vaccinated against flu:

The Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) particularly recommends a flu jab for people who are at a higher risk of complications or severe disease if they become infected with the flu virus.

There is a higher risk in children, adolescents and adults who have the following underlying conditions in particular:

- 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

The annual flu jab is also recommended for the following at-risk groups:

- People aged 60 or older
- Residents of old people's homes or care homes
- Pregnant women
- Staff in organisations with frequent contact with the public
- Medical staff
- People who may present a potential source of infection to others for whom they are caring or with whom they are living in the same household.

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

In addition, people with an increased risk of severe disease if they contract Covid-19 should generally have a booster jab in the autumn each year. The **flu jab and coronavirus jab can be administered at the same time**. Vaccine reactions are slightly more common where the two jabs are given at the same time rather than at separate times.

Protection for society

Relatives and people in close contact with people suffering from chronic illness should be vaccinated to protect themselves from being infected with flu.

Flu jabs

There have been vaccines for seasonal flu for many years. In addition to the inactivated (non-live) flu vaccines, there is a live vaccine administered as a nasal spray for children under 18 years of age. All flu vaccines have been tested in numerous studies – they have few side-effects and have proved themselves a million times over.

The Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) has been recommending a high-dose vaccine for those aged 60 and over since 2021. This has slightly but demonstrably increased efficacy in older people compared to non-high-dose vaccines.



Since the flu virus changes every year, the vaccines must be adjusted each year to provide the best possible protection. Seasonal flu vaccines contain parts of those virus strains that are most likely to occur with the highest incidence in the coming season.

Possible reactions to the vaccine

The flu vaccine is generally well tolerated. Immunisation with inactivated vaccines stimulates the body's immune system which may lead to local reddening or swelling at the injection site. In individual cases, there may also be a general feeling of malaise similar to that felt with a cold (fever, chills or sweating, fatigue, headaches, muscle or limb pains), which as a rule subsides without any consequences after a few days. It is not possible to develop the flu after immunisation with an inactivated vaccine.

Inactivated (non-live) vaccines do not contain any pathogens capable of replication. Hence they can even be administered to people with weakened immune systems. However, people with weakened immune systems may experience a worse immune response subsequent to the vaccination.

Following immunisation with a live vaccine (for children aged from 2 to 17 years inclusive), the commonest side effects observed are a stuffy or runny nose. It is possible to feel generally unwell, rather like having a cold, for a few days after having this vaccine too.

Local side effects (pain, redness, swelling) at the site of the injection are particularly common in people aged 60 and over who are given the high-dose vaccine. If the flu jab was administered at the same time as the coronavirus jab, vaccine reactions will be slightly more common than they would be had the jabs been given at separate times.

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.

Hence the timing of the flu jab could be the decisive factor in terms of building up optimal protection prior to a course of chemotherapy for cancer, for example. The immune response might also be worse in cases of immunodeficiency due to disease.

Please consult your doctor for advice!





What are some important points to consider?

A minor infection with a fever below 38.5°C is not a reason to avoid a flu vaccination. People with acute illnesses requiring treatment should be vaccinated only after they have recovered.

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, the 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.

Children and adolescents with weakened immune systems may not be given the live vaccine. It is also important to consider that children and adolescents who have certain underlying conditions (e.g. severe asthma) or are receiving certain medical treatments should not be vaccinated with the live vaccine.

In addition, people vaccinated with the live vaccine should avoid contact with severely immunocompromised individuals in the first one to two weeks after receiving the vaccination. There is a theoretical risk of transmission of the virus to severely immunocompromised people. To date, however, there have been no cases of such transmission recorded in the 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.

ALWAYS
USEFUL

Hygiene as a protective measure

Flu viruses are highly infectious. The annual flu jab provides the most effective protection. Simple hygiene measures can reduce the risk of infection further. They will protect you and those around you from infection not only with flu but also with other infectious diseases (e.g. gastrointestinal infections).

Hygiene tips

- ▶ Wash your hands with soap several times a day (e.g. when you come in from being outdoors, after going to the toilet and prior to preparing meals and eating).
- ▶ Refrain from coughing and sneezing into your hand, instead doing so into the crook of your arm or into a tissue.
- ▶ Use paper tissues and dispose of these after a single use.
- ▶ Those infected with flu should maintain a distance of at least two metres from at-risk people.
- ▶ Masks provide additional protection.



How to get vaccinated:

When?

It is best to get the jab in good time before flu season starts (from October to mid-December), as it can take up to a fortnight for the level of immune protection to peak. Getting vaccinated later on can still be worthwhile if you have missed this time frame.

Where?

Flu vaccinations are usually given in general medical, internal medical or women's health practices. Some health authorities, pharmacies and 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 Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) in Germany.

Vaccinations in autumn

The vaccination provides protection for one flu season. It can be administered along with COVID-19 or pneumococcal vaccines. In order to be protected during the current flu season, the vaccination has to be repeated each year.



Further information

- ▶ www.impfen-info.de/grippeimpfung
- ▶ www.infektionsschutz.de
- ▶ www.rki.de/influenza-impfung

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