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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. This applies to both young and older people.

## **Flu is not a cold!**

Even though the symptoms of both diseases appear similar at first glance, and colloquially a cold is often referred to as "the flu". A genuine flu (influenza) is not just a simple cold, but rather an infection that should be taken seriously. In a third of cases, the illness begins with the sudden development of a high fever. Typically this is accompanied by significant malaise, a dry cough and severe headaches and muscle and joint pains.

**Typical flu symptoms are:**

- Sudden onset of illness with fever ( $\geq 38.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ )
- Irritating dry cough
- Headache, sore throat, aching muscles and limbs
- Fatigue, often accompanied by nausea/vomiting
- Sweats

These typical symptoms occur in about one third of all cases.

The flu leads to inflammatory processes in the body. There is evidence that this can promote heart attacks or strokes in the presence of other risk factors. This risk as a result of influenza can be reduced by the flu vaccination.

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

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.

## 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
- Persons who may present a potential source of infection for persons at risk living in or cared for by them in the same household.

It is especially important to maintain a high flu vaccination proportion in at-risk groups during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to avoid severe cases of flu and bottlenecks in hospitals during the next flu epidemic.

Current and further information can be found on  
[www.impfen-info.de/grippeimpfung](http://www.impfen-info.de/grippeimpfung)

**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.

**An established method still in use today: vaccination**

There have been vaccines for seasonal flu for many years. In addition to inactivated flu vaccines, there are also live vaccines, which are delivered via nasal spray, for use in children aged two to seventeen. All flu vaccines have been tested in numerous studies: they have few side-effects and have proved themselves a million times over.

Since the 2021/2022 season, STIKO recommends a high-dose vaccine for the vaccination of persons aged 60 and over. This has a slightly but significantly increased efficacy in older persons compared to the non-high-dose vaccines.





Since the influenza virus can easily change, the vaccines must be adjusted every year in order to obtain the best possible protection. The so-called quadrivalent vaccines protect against the four influenza virus variants which are predicted to occur most frequently in the next influenza season. STIKO recommends the use of quadrivalent vaccines.

### Well tolerated, few side effects

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 consequences after a few days. It is not possible to develop the flu after immunisation with an inactivated vaccine.

Inactivated vaccines do 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 weakened immune system may result in a less reliable immunisation after vaccination.

Following immunisation with a live vaccine (for children aged from two to 17 years inclusive), the commonest side effects observed are a stuffy or runny nose. This vaccine may also lead to a general feeling of malaise similar to that associated with a cold for a few days after the immunisation.

With the high-dose vaccine for people aged 60 and over, local side effects at the injection site in particular (pain, redness, swelling) may occur more frequently. Flu vaccination can be administered together with vaccines to protect against Corona. In this case, vaccine reactions may occur more frequently in comparison to doses given at different 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. 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  $38.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  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.

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.



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. To date, however, there have been no reports of such transmission 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**

### **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 (e.g. when you come indoors, following a visit to the restroom as well as before preparing and eating food). 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 from October through the middle of December, as it takes up to 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. 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 Permanent Vaccination Commission (STIKO) in Germany.

#### **Get vaccinated once a year!**

Vaccination offers protection for an entire flu season. It can be administered along with vaccines against Corona or Pneumococci. In order to be protected during the current flu season, the vaccination has to be repeated each year.



## Further information

- [www.impfen-info.de/grippe](http://www.impfen-info.de/grippe)
- [www.infektionsschutz.de](http://www.infektionsschutz.de)
- [www.rki.de/influenza-impfung](http://www.rki.de/influenza-impfung)

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