



# Influenza Vaccine

## *What You Need to Know*

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*Deployment Medication Information Sheets (DMIS) are provided by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM). Written for soldiers and their families, they provide basic information on deployment medications that are intended as guidance only; consult your health care provider for more information.*

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### **What is influenza?**

Influenza, also known as the "flu," is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract. Compared with most other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, the flu often causes a more severe illness. Symptoms include:

- Fever (usually 100°F to 103°F in adults and often even higher in children).
- Cough.
- Sore throat.
- Runny or stuffy nose.
- Headache.
- Muscle aches.
- Extreme fatigue.

Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea can sometimes accompany the flu, especially in children, but they are rarely the most prominent symptoms.

### **How do you get influenza?**

The flu is spread easily by coughing and sneezing, so outbreaks are very common.

### **Who should get the vaccine and how is it given?**



The flu vaccine is recommended for people who are in close or frequent contact with large groups of people such as in the military environment. Studies of healthy young adults have shown the flu vaccine to be 70% to 90% effective in preventing illness.

Your health care provider will give you the vaccine in an injection. Because flu viruses change from year to year, the vaccine must be taken annually. Vaccines from last year can't be used to prevent the flu this year.

In the United States, the flu usually occurs from about November until April. The number of flu cases is very low until December, and most cases occur between January and March. Since it takes about 1 to 2 weeks after you get the vaccine for it to be effective in fighting the flu, you should get your flu shot in September.

Getting a yearly flu shot can prevent most of the illness and death caused by the flu.

## What does the military require?

The vaccine is required for all active forces for the prevention of influenza A and B, which can cause epidemics within military populations, especially under conditions of crowding such as recruit training, aboard ship, extended air transport, or certain deployment settings.

## Are there any side effects?

You may have some soreness at the injection site or mild side effects such as a headache or low-grade fever for about a day after vaccination. These side effects most often occur in people who have not been exposed to the flu virus in the past. You cannot get the “flu” from the vaccine.

## Is there any reason I shouldn't get the vaccine?

- If you have an allergy to eggs, you should not get the flu vaccine.
- If you have a fever or illness, your health care provider may give your vaccination at a later date.
- Tell your health care provider if you're taking any over-the-counter, herbal, or prescription medicine, especially steroids or prednisone.
- The flu vaccine is less effective if you are on immunosuppressive therapy. An increased effect of theophylline and warfarin is possible.

## What if I'm pregnant or breast-feeding?

- The vaccine should be given during pregnancy only when clearly needed. Talk to your health care provider about the risks and benefits. Waiting until the second or third trimester for vaccination may be reasonable.
- The flu vaccine does not affect the safety of breast-feeding for mothers or infants.

### **You can avoid getting the flu!**

- Get the vaccination at the appropriate time.
- Practice good hygiene and handwashing.
- In the United States, the vaccine is the main way to prevent the flu.
- In addition to the vaccine, there are some antiviral drugs for influenza A infection that may also be prescribed by your health care provider depending on your situation.

**Be sure the vaccination is recorded in your medical record.**

## Where can I get more information?

- Health care provider at your military treatment facility.
- Military Immunizations web page: <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/immunization/vaccines.html>
- CDC Specific Disease web site: [www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm)
- CDC Vaccine Information web site: [www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm)

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