

Researchers explain why you and your family should get vaccinated against the flu

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One little stick can save your life. The flu shot remains critically important to fight off the influenza virus, both around the world and in your home, say doctors and researchers at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, who encourage people 6 months of age and older to get vaccinated against this year's influenza virus.

"The [flu vaccine](#) has become incredibly important as one of the ways in which we can protect the population at large," says Lisa Maragakis, director of The Johns Hopkins Hospital's Department of Hospital Epidemiology and Infection Control. "The virus changes slightly from year to year. Therefore, it's very efficient at infecting people who previously have had the flu or have been vaccinated in prior years."

"Preventing influenza is a public health priority," says Johns Hopkins professor of pediatrics and respiratory viral infection expert Julia McMillan. "Thirty-six thousand people in the U.S. die every year from influenza."

More than just the sniffles or an upset stomach, the flu is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by [influenza viruses](#) that infect the nose, throat and lungs. Complications can include pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of [chronic medical conditions](#).

"Influenza is a very specific infectious disease that causes severe symptoms and even death in some people," says Maragakis.

Johns Hopkins Medicine joins the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in encouraging people over the age of 6 months to get vaccinated each year against the flu.

"The more people who are vaccinated, the better the public's health is," says McMillan. "School-age children are the 'leaders of the pack.' They're the ones who are first infected. Protecting that age group is very, very important."

Flu season lasts all winter but typically peaks in January. Since it takes about two weeks to develop post-vaccination antibodies against influenza, late November and early December are still ideal times to get vaccinated.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

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