

Experts say flu season could be severe this year

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Credit: National Cancer Institute

If last year's active flu season and this year's severe season in the Southern Hemisphere is any indication of what flu season will look like across the country beginning this fall, then it's important to get vaccinated soon against influenza, according to an expert at Baylor College of Medicine.

"There is every reason to expect that we could have a severe [flu season](#) this year," said Dr. Robert Atmar, professor and interim chief of the section of infectious diseases at Baylor. "It's always hard to predict what is going to happen, but people should be prepared."

Each year, the strains included in the vaccine are based on the flu activity across the world. This year's vaccine is available in the trivalent and quadrivalent forms. The trivalent will include three [vaccine strains](#): H1N1 and H3N2, which are both A strains, and B Victoria. The quadrivalent vaccine will include the three strains in the [trivalent vaccine](#) as well as the B Yamagata strain.

The nasal form of the [influenza vaccine](#) is not recommended again this year because studies did not demonstrate effectiveness against influenza A strains, which tend to be the more severe kinds of infections.

The [flu vaccine](#) takes about two weeks to provide full protection and is recommended for everyone over the age of 6 months. It is safe for pregnant women to receive the vaccine during any trimester. Pregnant women will pass their antibodies to their unborn child, which will help protect them from the virus during the first six months of their life.

Rather than the standard influenza vaccine, it is recommended that those over the age of 65 get one of two vaccines: a higher dose vaccine that has been available for several years now or an adjuvant vaccine that is available for the first time in the United States this year. There is no preferential recommendation between these two vaccines as both have showed an improved antibody response as well as improved efficacy and effectiveness compared to the standard dose.

While no [vaccine](#) is 100 percent effective, it is very effective in preventing severe complications related to influenza, including hospitalization, pneumonia and even death.

"Even though some people may have gotten sick with influenza after getting the flu shot, there's a good chance that they did not get as sick as they would have if they had not received the flu shot," Atmar said.

Atmar said that there also are other respiratory viruses that circulate during the winter months that can cause an illness that looks like [influenza](#), but could be due to a rhinovirus, adenovirus, parainfluenza or others. The [flu shot](#) does not prevent against these infections, which is why it is important to get in touch with a primary care physician when experiencing flu-like symptoms.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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