

No, it's not too late to get a flu shot

January 8 2018, by Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Is it too late to get a flu shot?

We know you've been busy with the holidays, spending time in airports and on road trips to see family and friends.

But the [holiday season](#) is over and it's time to get back to reality. The [flu season](#) is most certainly upon us. And you need to deal with it.

During the last week of 2017, "[influenza activity](#) increased sharply in the United States," according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Outpatient visits to doctors and other medical professionals by people suffering from influenza-like illnesses were above normal baseline levels in every region of the country, the CDC reported. And among the 54 jurisdictions in the flu surveillance system (every state plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands), 50 reported "regional" or "widespread" flu activity at the end of last year.

So far this flu season, at least 3,927 people have been sent to the hospital with laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza.

One child was confirmed to have died of the flu during the last week of 2017. The most recent statistics that include adults were from the week that ended Dec. 16, when 6.7 percent of deaths reported to the National Center for Health Statistics were attributed to influenza and pneumonia.

The good news, according to [health experts](#), is that it's not too late to reduce your risk by getting a [flu shot](#).

The CDC recommends a flu shot for everyone over the age of 6 months, unless you have a specific medical reason to skip it (such as an allergy to the vaccine).

Only shots are advised this year. The FluMist nasal vaccine offered in the past has not been very effective against H1N1 strains in recent years, so the CDC says it "should not be used."

You may have heard that the flu that's doing the most damage this year is an H3N2 strain, and that it is less vulnerable to the vaccine. That's true. But public health experts still say that an imperfect flu shot is better than no flu shot.

And since the flu season could last well into March or April, there's still plenty of time for it to make a difference.

The flu may not sound like a big deal, but if you've ever had it, you know it can make you feel miserable. If you're lucky, you may have mild symptoms like a cough and a runny nose. But you can also wind up with a bad fever, chills and more serious complications like pneumonia, bronchitis and sinus infections.

If you've heard that the flu shot might actually give you the flu, rest assured that's impossible. The vaccine is made from an inactivated virus. It's able to prompt your immune system to make antibodies against the flu, so it's ready in case you encounter the real the thing. But the shot itself can't infect you.

It does take a couple of weeks for those antibodies to develop, so some people may get sick soon after getting the shot. But that doesn't mean the shot made them sick, according to experts at Harvard Medical School. That just means those people waited too long to get vaccinated.

Already got your flu shot? There's still more you can do.

The CDC asks everyone to fight back against influenza by helping prevent the spread of germs in general. That means washing your hands, using a hand sanitizer, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue or the inside of your arm.

Also, if your doctor prescribes an antiviral medication like Tamiflu

(oseltamivir), Relenza (zanamivir) and Rapivab (peramivir), be sure to take it. Those are working really well this flu season, the CDC says.

©2018 Los Angeles Times

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: No, it's not too late to get a flu shot (2018, January 8) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-01-late-flu-shot.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.