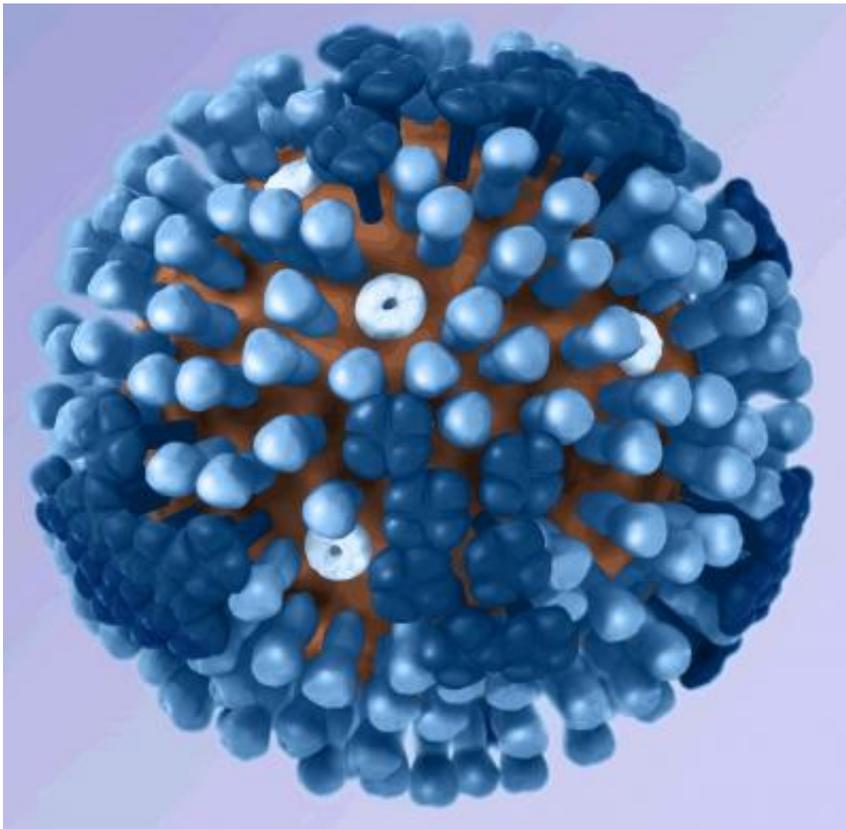


# Last year the flu was deadly. Here's how you can fight it now

September 21 2018, by Howard Cohen, Miami Herald

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A 3-D image of a flu virus. Credit: Center for Disease Control

The flu was "everywhere" last year. A Centers for Disease Control doctor cautioned that the last flu season proved to be one of the deadliest.

That's why the CDC is urging people to act now, just before the October start of the 2018-19 flu season and get vaccinated. That advice comes even if you delayed a few months into the previous flu season and got vaccinated earlier this year.

Some of the age ranges for certain vaccines have been lowered and some vaccines were reformulated to better prevent currently circulating viruses.

Among the benefits of getting vaccinated for the flu: Getting a vaccine doesn't mean you won't get the flu, but if you do get sick it could be less severe, experts say.

In addition, a 2007 CDC study found that the flu vaccination significantly reduced a child's risk of dying from [influenza](#). The study analyzed data from four flu seasons between 2010 and 2014 and found that "flu vaccination reduced the risk of flu-associated death by half, or 51 percent, among children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and by nearly two-thirds, 65 percent, among healthy children."

Vaccines to fight the flu can also protect women during and after pregnancy and protect a baby after delivery, the CDC said.

The push to take the flu seriously is especially relevant given the severity of the recent season. Vaccines are available at pharmacies, including those at Publix, Walgreens, CVS and most doctor's offices.

"The 2017-18 season was the first season to be classified as a high severity across all age groups," the CDC reported. The influenza-like-illness activity ramped up in November, "reached an extended period of high activity during January and February nationally, and remained elevated through the end of March," the CDC reported.

Adult deaths from the flu are not nationally notifiable, the CDC said, but children's cases are tabulated. The number of pediatric deaths attributed to the flu, as of Aug. 25, numbered 180—the worst since 171 died during the particularly severe 2012-13 flu season.

Of the 180 children who died in the last year, 80 percent, or 144 of them, did not receive the vaccine during the season, the CDC said.

At least five children died from flu-related illnesses during the 2017-18 season in Florida, including West Palm Beach seventh-grader Dylan Winnik, 12, who died on Jan. 23. His mother had initially thought he had a cold.

In addition, the duration of cases at or above the national baseline was 19 weeks, "making the 2017-2018 season one of the longest in recent years," the CDC said.

According to the CDC, flu viruses are most common during the fall and winter months. Influenza activity starts to pick up the pace in October and November. The peak of flu activity happens sometime between December and February, but it can last as late as May.

So what will this flu season be like into 2019?

The short answer, according to the CDC: "It is not possible to predict what this flu season will be like. While flu spreads every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season varies from one season to another."

But the CDC reports that there are several new things this season. Among them:

- Flu vaccines have been updated to better match currently

circulating viruses. The B/Victoria component was changed and the influenza A(H3N2) component was updated.

- For the 2018-2019 season, the nasal spray [flu vaccine](#)—or live attenuated influenza vaccine or LAIV, often a go-to option for young children who hate shots—starting at 2 years of age, is recommended. The vaccine is also approved for use in non-pregnant women up to age 49, unless your doctor warns against its use depending on your medical history.
- All LAIV vaccines will be quadrivalent, designed to protect against four different flu viruses: two influenza A viruses and two influenza B viruses. Most regular-dose egg-based flu shots will be quadrivalent. "All recombinant vaccine will be quadrivalent. No trivalent recombinant vaccine will be available this season," the CDC said.
- Cell-grown flu vaccine will be quadrivalent. For this vaccine, the influenza A(H3N2) and both influenza B reference viruses will be cell-derived, and the influenza A(H1N1) will be egg-derived.
- The intradermal flu vaccine, a shot injected into the skin instead of the muscle using a smaller needle than the regular flu shot and requiring less antigen to be as effective as the regular flu shot, will not be available this season.
- The age recommendation for Fluarix Equivalent, which uses mammalian culture rather than chicken embryos, was changed from 3 years old and older to 6 months and older.
- The age recommendation for Afluria Quadrivalent, an inactivated influenza vaccine, was changed from 18 years and older to 5 years and older.

According to the CDC, "flu vaccines protect against the three or four viruses that research suggests will be most common."

This season healthcare providers will provide vaccines in various ways, such as standard dose flu shots given into the muscle via needle or, for

some individuals ages 18-64, two varieties, Afluria and Afluria Quadrivalent, can be delivered via jet injector, a medical device that uses a high-pressure, narrow stream of fluid to penetrate the skin instead of a hypodermic needle.

Also, shots made using a vaccine production technology that does not require the use of flu virus.

The CDC recommends that you get your vaccination now, on the eve of the 2018-19 flu season, before it picks up steam in October.

Some school districts, such as in Palm Beach County, have already started social media campaigns to spread awareness of the coming flu [season](#) and have begun programs to offer shots for children.

"You should get a flu vaccine before flu begins spreading in your community," the CDC suggests. "It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against flu to develop in the body, so make plans to get vaccinated early in the fall, before [flu season](#) begins."

In other words, no later than the end of October.

But if you're a procrastinator, you are still advised to get the vaccine even if it's January or later. But the CDC counsels that children are a special concern.

"Children who need two doses of [vaccine](#) to be protected should start the vaccination process sooner, because the two doses must be given at least four weeks apart."

For the most current influenza surveillance information, the CDC regularly updates its FluView Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance

Report.

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