

# Prepare for a challenging flu season: Get vaccinated now

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Flu season usually peaks in winter; however, the best time to prevent infection is before the virus appears in a community.

"The best time to protect yourself against [influenza](#) is before we see it

start circulating in large amounts," says Dr. Nipunie Rajapakse, a pediatric infectious diseases physician with the Mayo Clinic Children's Center. "We are starting to detect cases in different parts of the country."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports influenza A as the dominant strain of flu virus in the U.S., though the strain may change over the [flu season](#). Flu activity has been reported as low, but is beginning to increase.

"Now is the perfect time to go and get vaccinated. It takes about two weeks after you get your vaccine for your body's immune system to mount a good antibody response. You need to factor that time into it as well," she says.

After two mild seasons of influenza infection, Dr. Rajapakse says that there is a caution of a more challenging one with higher rates of illness.

"One of the things that we look at is what happens in the southern hemisphere. Sometimes this can help us understand what we may expect," Dr. Rajapakse says. "Last year, during their flu season in Australia, they saw some of the highest rates of influenza that they've seen since 2019. And that makes us feel cautious going into this flu season that we may end up seeing high rates of influenza this year.

"It's all the more reason for people to ensure they get their [flu vaccine](#). It's one of the safest and most effective ways to prevent flu illness and infection. And especially since we might be in for a bit of a rough flu year."

According to Dr. Rajapakse, many people did not have the flu in the last two years due to low circulation of the virus, and there is more vulnerability to getting infected this season if they do not get vaccinated.

## Young children are at the highest risk

Most healthy people can recover from flu infection independently, but complications can be severe for [young children](#), older adults and those with weakened immune systems.

Vaccination remains the most vital tool against the flu. Young [children](#) are one of the highest risk age groups for having a severe influenza illness.

"Children under 2 years of age are one of the populations we see who end up in the hospital. That's why we encourage everyone over 6 months of age, especially young children, to get a flu vaccine every year. It helps reduce the risk of having a severe influenza infection, ending up in the hospital or dying from flu," says Dr. Rajapakse.

There are nine vaccines approved for the 2022-2023 flu season, depending on the age and health of a patient. The FluMist is a [nasal spray](#) rather than a shot that may be an option for some children. It's approved for use in healthy nonpregnant people, 2 through 49 years old.

Dr. Rajapakse says children under 8 who are getting the flu vaccine for the first time will require two doses.

"Getting them their first dose as soon as possible is especially important because they still need to get that second dose in a month," she adds.

Children who have previously had a flu shot will not require a second dose. Your [health care provider](#) can tell you if your child needs two doses of the vaccine.

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