

# Flu vaccination and cancer

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Mayo Clinic recommend a yearly flu vaccination for everyone six months and older, with rare exceptions. Vaccination is your best defense against flu. If you haven't gotten your flu shot yet, now's the time.

For most people, influenza, or the flu, resolves on its own. But sometimes the flu and its complications can be deadly. People at higher risk of developing flu complications include [young children](#), [pregnant women](#) and those two weeks postpartum, people over 65, people with weakened immune systems and some [chronic illnesses](#), and people who are obese.

Having cancer, being treated for cancer or being a cancer survivor increase your risk for flu complications. For people at high risk, [flu complications](#) can include pneumonia, heart problems and [acute respiratory distress syndrome](#). Pneumonia is one of the most serious complications as it can be deadly for [older adults](#) and people with a chronic illness.

## **What is the flu?**

What many people call the flu is actually viral gastroenteritis, or stomach flu, which is characterized by diarrhea, nausea, and abdominal cramps and pain. Influenza is the true flu. It's a viral infection that attacks your respiratory system, including your nose, throat and lungs.

At first, flu may seem like a common cold, with a runny nose, sneezing and sore throat. But while colds usually develop slowly, flu tends to come on suddenly. And although a cold can be a bother, you usually feel much worse with flu.

## **How to keep yourself healthy**

Unlike the common cold and stomach flu, there is a vaccine for flu. While it's not 100% effective, getting vaccinated for flu can reduce your risk of becoming infected with flu, and lessen its severity and lower your risk of hospitalization if you are infected.

In addition to vaccination, it's also important to take several measures to reduce the spread of infection, including:

- Wash your hands. Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is an effective way to prevent many common infections. Or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers if soap and water aren't available.
- Avoid touching your face. Specifically, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth to prevent spreading viruses.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow. Then wash your hands.
- Clean surfaces. Regularly clean often-touched surfaces to prevent spread of infection from touching a surface with the virus on it and then your face.
- Avoid crowds. The flu spreads easily wherever people gather—in child care centers, schools, office buildings, auditoriums and public transportation. By avoiding crowds during peak flu season, you reduce your chances of infection.

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