

Find the flu vaccine that's right for you

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School's back in session, which means that germs that are carrying illnesses such as influenza can start to spread rapidly among classmates, and to their families outside of school. But the good news is that with a variety of flu vaccination options, almost everyone can find just the right one for their needs, says an expert at Baylor College of Medicine.

"In the United States, it is recommended that everyone over the age of 6 months be vaccinated against the flu, and there are many vaccines available that will fit your need based on age and other important risk factors," said Dr. Pedro Piedra, professor of molecular virology and microbiology and of pediatrics at Baylor. "This year, the live attenuated vaccine, the FluMist, is available again after the manufacturer changed the novel H1N1 strain in the vaccine and showed evidence of effectiveness."

Last year's flu season was one of the worst flu seasons since the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 in terms of hospitalizations, and adult and pediatric deaths. The vast majority of the pediatric deaths occurred in [children](#) who were not vaccinated against [influenza](#).

In children, it's important to keep in mind that:

- Children who are under 9 years of age who have not received an influenza vaccine (live or shot) in a previous year should get two doses of the vaccine four weeks apart this year
- Those under 9 years of age who have received a single dose of a [flu vaccine](#) in the past should get two doses of the vaccine four weeks apart
- Because babies under 6 months of age cannot get the vaccine, it is recommended that everyone in the household be vaccinated to protect the child

FluMist (live attenuated virus)

Piedra, who also is with Texas Children's Hospital, said that the availability of the FluMist will be beneficial for children, who are more likely to be fearful of shots. He also noted that the biggest benefit of the FluMist has been demonstrated in children.

The FluMist is approved for those between the ages of 2 and 49 years who are healthy. FluMist is a live attenuated influenza virus vaccine and is not recommended for:

- Children taking aspirin or aspirin-containing medication
- Those who have a history of a severe allergic reaction to the vaccine or any of its components
- Those who have received influenza antiviral medication within 48 hours
- Women who are pregnant
- Those with a significant health condition such as immunodeficiency, moderate to severe asthma, etc.

Those with other medical conditions should discuss with their physician if the live vaccine is recommended for them.

Flu shot (inactivated virus)

There also are a number of inactivated flu vaccines available for children over the age of 6 months. The only contraindication for inactivated influenza vaccine is a history of a severe allergic reaction to the vaccine or any of its components. Piedra recommends consulting with your child's pediatrician on which vaccine is best for them.

In addition, anyone with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome within six weeks of receipt of an [influenza vaccine](#) should talk to their doctor. Pregnant women should get the inactivated vaccine (the flu shot) to protect themselves and their unborn child.

In adults, there are several trivalent and quadrivalent versions of the inactivated vaccine available. The trivalent includes three strains of influenza, and the quadrivalent covers four strains.

It is recommended that adults over the age of 65 years get a high-dose or adjuvanted vaccine. There also are vaccines that are not derived from eggs for those who have a history of a severe, life threatening egg allergy.

Take early action

Piedra recommends getting vaccinated against influenza now and not waiting for the outbreak to begin. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to be fully effective in adults and children who require one vaccine dose. However, for children who require two doses of the vaccine at least four weeks apart, it will take about six weeks to be fully effective.

"The flu season is unpredictable every year, but the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones is to get vaccinated," Piedra said.

While the [vaccine](#) is effective, some may still contract influenza. Piedra recommends discussing the need for an influenza antiviral strategy with your physician so that if there is breakthrough infection, you can get a prescription for antiviral medication quickly. Antiviral therapy is most effective when administered in the first 48 hours of symptom onset.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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