



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
MENTAL HYGIENE**

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Commissioner

Flu and You: Important Information for Older Adults

What is influenza?

Influenza is a seasonal respiratory (lung) infection that causes fever and a cough or sore throat. It is most common during the fall and winter months.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is easily transmitted through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person who coughs or sneezes.

How serious is seasonal influenza?

Every year, an average of about 1,100 New Yorkers die of seasonal influenza. Adults 65 and older, especially those with underlying medical conditions, are most likely to experience severe illness, complications, hospitalization or death.

What conditions increase my risk of getting very sick with influenza?

The following conditions increase the risk of severe illness:

- Asthma or any other chronic respiratory diseases
- Heart, kidney or liver disease
- Blood diseases, such as sickle cell anemia
- Metabolic disorders, such as diabetes
- Weakened immune system, from illness or medication
- Neuromuscular disorders that interfere with breathing or the discharge of mucus

How can I protect myself against influenza?

Getting vaccinated is the best way to avoid influenza.

How does the seasonal influenza vaccine work?

The flu shot is made from killed or weakened parts of three strains of the influenza virus (the ones most likely to cause flu this year). It takes about two weeks for protection to develop. Until then, you're still at risk of getting the flu. That's why it's better to get vaccinated before the flu season really gets under way.

How safe is the influenza vaccine?

Influenza vaccines have been monitored and evaluated for safety for decades. Like any medical product, influenza vaccines can cause mild side effects, but serious reactions are extremely rare. By contrast, influenza and its complications kill 36,000 Americans annually.

Where can I get a flu shot?

You can get your yearly influenza vaccination from your family doctor or primary-care provider. In addition, many commercial pharmacies now offer seasonal influenza vaccine for adults. People 50 and older who do not have regular doctors or health insurance coverage can get seasonal flu vaccination low cost or no cost through select senior centers, Health Department clinics, community health centers and New York City public hospitals. Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/flu to find out which senior centers will offer vaccine services this year.

For more information about seasonal flu, including where to get a flu shot, call 311 or visit nyc.gov/flu.

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