

Navy/Marine Corps Influenza (Flu) Vaccination Program

Navy/Marine Corps military personnel are required to be vaccinated annually for influenza. Influenza, commonly referred to simply as the “flu”, is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract. Symptoms can include: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches and extreme fatigue. Most people recover in one to two weeks, but some people may develop life-threatening complications from the infection. The most effective protection against the influenza virus is an annual flu vaccination.

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known simply as the “flu” is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory system. The infection typically lasts about a week. Symptoms can include: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches and extreme fatigue. Certain people, especially people with pre-existing medical conditions and the very young and old, can get much sicker. In these groups, the infection may cause severe complications, including seizures, pneumonia and even death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 10-20 percent of Americans get the flu each flu season. Although most people recover, more than 100,000 people are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die annually from the flu or its complications.

What is in the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine currently comes in two forms:

- a flu shot, or
- a nasal spray.

The flu shot is made up of inactivated influenza viruses that have been broken down into pieces and purified. Vaccination involves an injection directly into the muscle of the arm. The flu shot has been used in the United States for many years.

The flu vaccine nasal spray was licensed for use in 2003. This type of vaccine is also known as live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV). The LAIV nasal spray contains live, but weakened influenza virus. It is sprayed directly into the nose instead of being injected into the arm.



Who should take the flu vaccine?

In general, anyone who wants to reduce the risk of getting the flu should be vaccinated. The vaccine is required for all active duty forces. Sailors and Marines are at particular risk as the infection is spread through the respiratory system and confined living and working conditions can accelerate the spread of the disease. Civilians who are at high risk of having serious flu complications (or people who live with or care for people at high risk) should also get a flu vaccination every year.

The flu shot is specifically recommended for:

- Children 6-23 months;
- People aged 2-64 with chronic health conditions;
- People aged 65 years or older (with or without chronic health conditions);
- Residents of long-term care facilities;
- Health care personnel providing direct care;

Who should not take the flu vaccine?

Talk with your doctor or primary care physician **before** getting a flu vaccination if:

- you are pregnant;
- you are currently sick with a fever;
- you have severe allergies (including allergic reactions to eggs or to a previous vaccination);
- you take other medicines (especially steroids or prednisone);
- you have long term health problems such as heart or kidney disease, diabetes, etc.;
- you have a weakened immune system; or
- you have a history of a condition known as Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS).

Based upon your age and your current medical condition, your physician will help you decide which vaccination – a flu shot or nasal spray – may be right for you.

When should I take the vaccine?

Because flu viruses can change from year to year, the vaccine must be taken annually to be effective. In the United States, the flu season is typically November through March of each year. Since it takes 1 to 2 weeks after you get the vaccine for it to be effective, you should get vaccinated beginning in September or October of each year.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

There are different types and strains of the flu virus that can affect humans. Each year scientists try to predict which flu virus will be most abundant during the next flu season and they make a vaccine for that particular type or strain. When the “match” between the vaccine and the circulating virus is close, **the vaccine is effective in preventing influenza in about 70-90% of healthy people 65 years or younger.**

Are there any risks from the flu vaccine?

Since the viruses in the flu shot and nasal spray have been inactivated or weakened, **you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.** However, taking a vaccine, like any medicine, may cause mild to serious side effects, including allergic reactions. Mild symptoms (such as headaches, runny nose, congestion, sore throat, aches, etc.) may occur after vaccination and last up to 1-2 days. If you experience any more severe symptoms (such as high fever, difficulty breathing, fast or erratic heart beat, dizziness, etc.), **CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY!** Fortunately, **the risk of severe problems from taking a flu vaccine is very rare.**

Will the flu vaccine protect me from the avian flu?

The recent outbreaks of avian flu reported in Asia and Europe have resulted in high media attention. Although avian flu is normally only found in birds (and less frequently, pigs), there have been documented cases where humans have also been infected. Since there is no vaccine for avian flu at this time, your regular flu shot offers you limited protection against this type of influenza. (For more information, see the Navy Environmental Health Center Fact Sheet for Avian Flu)

To reduce your risk of getting the flu:

- **Get your vaccination!**
- **Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze**
- **Practice good hygiene & hand washing**
- **If you feel sick, STAY AT HOME AND AWAY FROM OTHERS!**

For more information, contact your local health department or see the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu>