

Frequently Asked Questions 2010-2011 Seasonal Influenza



What is Influenza?

Influenza (“flu”) is a contagious disease which can be spread by coughing, sneezing, or nasal secretions. Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection are highest among children. For most people, symptoms last only a few days and include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills, muscle aches, and fatigue. Infants, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with certain health conditions – such as heart, lung or kidney disease or a weakened immune system – can get much sicker. Flu can cause high fever and pneumonia, and make existing medical conditions worse. Each year thousands of people die from seasonal influenza and even more require hospitalization. By getting vaccinated you can protect yourself from influenza and may also avoid spreading influenza to others. In the Northern hemisphere, winter is typically the time for flu. The timing and duration of flu seasons vary. While flu outbreaks can happen as early as October, influenza activity generally peaks in January and may extend as late as May.

Who should get vaccinated with the annual seasonal influenza vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommend influenza vaccine for everyone ages 6 months and older. It is current Department of Defense (DoD) policy that annual seasonal flu vaccinations are mandatory for all active duty military personnel, Selected Reserves and healthcare workers providing direct patient care unless medically or administratively exempt. Navy Medicine’s seasonal flu vaccine immunization program is designed to protect Sailors and Marines, mission-essential personnel, healthcare personnel, and beneficiaries. The DoD goal is to achieve 90 percent immunization compliance for all active duty members by December 1, 2010. Vaccination compliance for Navy and Marine Corps active duty members will be monitored via the Medical Readiness Reporting System (MRRS). Marine Corps Base Quantico leadership will be provided weekly progress updates on unit vaccination compliance rates. Force protection is the responsibility of every commander and service member. It is important to take the proper actions to protect personnel, beneficiaries, coworkers and family members against the seasonal flu.

When will vaccines be available?

Seasonal vaccines are expected to begin arriving at military medical facilities in September 2010 based on the delivery from the supplier. Any eligible military beneficiary (regardless of enrollment status) may present to receive influenza vaccines once adequate supply is received. Vaccination supply updates will be posted on the Naval Health Clinic Quantico (NHCQ) web site. The site is located at <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nhcq/Pages/Welcome.aspx>.

Military members should receive vaccinations from their military treatment facility for individual medical readiness purposes. Eligible beneficiaries may choose to receive flu vaccines from the civilian retail pharmacy setting. Please refer to the TRICARE web site for additional information and pharmacy site locations at <http://www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/jsp/Medical/IsItCovered.do?kw=Flu+Vaccine>.

Why is a flu vaccine required every year?

The most effective strategy for preventing influenza is annual vaccination. Influenza viruses are always changing, so annual vaccination is recommended. Each year scientists try to match the viruses in the vaccine to those most likely to cause flu that year. The 2010-2011 vaccine provides protection against A/H1N1 (pandemic) influenza and two other influenza viruses – influenza A/H3N2 and influenza B. It takes up to 2 weeks for protection to develop after the vaccination. Protection lasts about a year. The best way to help keep personnel and their families healthy is to ensure seasonal flu vaccination at the earliest opportunity as a primary method of reducing seasonal flu illness.

Will there be more than one vaccine required this season?

This year the novel H1N1 flu vaccine has been combined with the seasonal flu vaccine so only one vaccination is needed for adults. Children ages 6 months to 8 years may require two doses of the vaccination (given at least 4 weeks apart) to receive protection. Ask your healthcare provider for details.

What types of vaccines are available this season?

There are two types of influenza vaccine – the flu shot and flu nasal spray. The flu shot is an inactivated (killed) vaccine and is given by injection into the muscle. The nasal spray is a live, attenuated (weakened influenza vaccine) which is sprayed into the nostrils. All people 6 months of age and older should get vaccinated with the flu vaccine. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of severe influenza and their close contacts including healthcare personnel and close contacts of children younger than 6 months. The injectable vaccine is primarily for use in persons over 6 months but under 2 years of age and for persons 50 years of age and older and for those persons with a medical or operational contraindication to using flu nasal spray. Either the injectable vaccine or the nasal spray is recommended for healthy, non-pregnant persons 2 through 49 years of age.

There is also a new “high dose” inactivated flu shot this year which is available for people 65 years of age and older. This vaccine will not be available at NHCQ, but may be available at some of the larger military medical treatment facilities or at local retail pharmacies offering vaccines. Additional information on obtaining the “high dose” vaccine may be found at the following site:
<http://www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/jsp/Medical/IsItCovered.do?kw=Flu+Vaccine>.

Who should not receive the flu vaccine?

Although allergies to flu vaccines are rare, please inform your healthcare provider if you have any allergies. Influenza vaccine virus is grown in eggs, so people with an egg allergy should not get influenza vaccine. If you have an allergy to any vaccine component or previous influenza vaccine, tell your healthcare provider. Also inform your healthcare provider if you have a history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (a severe paralytic illness, also called GBS). Your healthcare provider will determine if you should receive the flu vaccine.

What other preventive measures will limit the effects of flu?

Take everyday actions to stay healthy. Remember to cover your mouth when you cough, wash your hands often, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth and stay home from work or school when you are sick. Additional information concerning influenza may be found at <http://cdc.gov/flu>.