

## **The Flu Vaccine – Good for Teens!**

At this time of year, you probably know lots of people with the flu. The flu can make people feel terrible – hot, cold, achy, tired, and out of sorts. Over 36,000 people die of the flu or its complications in the U.S. each year. Many more are hospitalized.

You know how important it is for babies and seniors to get the flu vaccine. But did you that doctors now recommend that your teenager up to age 18 get a flu vaccine every year?

Making sure that your teenager is vaccinated for the flu each October or November will help reduce the likelihood of their contracting the flu virus. This will also reduce the amount of time they are out of school – and the amount of time you have to stay home to take care of them! It will also reduce the need to take antibiotics for flu complications.<sup>1</sup>

If your teenager has kidney disease, diabetes, heart problems or asthma, it is even more important that they get the flu vaccine. This can help prevent complications like pneumonia. If your teen takes aspirin regularly, you should make sure that they get the flu vaccine. They are risk of getting a serious condition called Reyes Syndrome if they get the flu.

Making sure your teen is vaccinated against the flu protects the people around them. By protecting them there is less chance that they will get the flu and pass it on – to you, to your other children, to other members of your household, and to your larger community. So it is especially important for your teen to get vaccinated if they are around other people who are at risk if they get the flu, like babies, the elderly, and people with a serious illness.

If your teen hates getting shots, they can get the flu vaccine in a nasal mist (a type of spray that is squirted up the nose). The vaccine contains killed flu viruses that won't cause people to get the flu, but makes the body develop antibodies that fight off the live flu virus and infection.

So when October or November rolls around, be sure to get your teen vaccinated. This will help your teen build up immunity before the winter flu season. But even after November, your teen can still get a flu shot and have some protection against the flu.

Your teen may have some minor side effects for a few days after getting a flu shot. The most common side effect is soreness in the area where s/he gets the shot. Some teens may feel achy or have a mild fever. But the side effects aren't as bad as the flu, and don't last as long. If your teen gets the flu, s/he can be sick for as long as three weeks!

If your teen is allergic to eggs or egg products, make sure her/his doctor knows before s/he gets either type of flu vaccine. The ingredients for flu vaccines are grown inside eggs, so it may be inappropriate for your teen to get the vaccine due to their allergy.

For more information about why getting the flu vaccine for your teen is so important, go to the Kids Health section of the website of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control at [http://kidshealth.org/research/flu\\_shots.html](http://kidshealth.org/research/flu_shots.html).

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<sup>1</sup> The flu vaccine is about 80% effective against the flu.