

HEALTH ALERT!

It's Not Too Late To Get Your Flu Shot!

Still Time To Get Vaccinated Before Flu Season Hits

(NAPSA)—It's not too late to protect yourself against influenza this season by getting an annual flu shot. This good health advice comes from health officials, who stress you can get vaccinated in December and even into January for protection before the influenza season is in full force.

Did you know that each year in the United States, the flu is associated with more than 20,000 deaths and an additional 100,000 hospitalizations? According to estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the flu strikes at least 1 in every 10 adults annually.

A flu shot offers the most effective way to prevent getting influenza. In fact, CDC officials urge annual immunization for anyone who wants protection from the flu, and stress vaccination is especially important for the elderly and chronically ill, who are at greater risk of developing serious, potentially fatal complications from influenza.

"Many people do not realize that getting a flu shot even in December and beyond is still effective in building immunity for the coming flu season," said William Schaffner, MD, of Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID). "If you have not received your annual flu shot yet, contact your health care provider to find out how to



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get one and ensure your protection during this flu season."

While the flu season can begin as early as December, influenza activity typically peaks between January and early March. Therefore, as it only takes two weeks for the body to develop protective antibodies, the flu vaccine can provide continued health benefits even after evidence of local flu activity.

How Influenza Spreads

Influenza viruses are easily transmitted from person to person via droplets of respiratory secretions that can be easily spread by sneezing and coughing. The virus can also be contracted by direct contact with infected persons. The disease is spread even before influenza symptoms appear.

Therefore, caretakers and those who work and live with high-risk adults and children should be immunized from influenza. By protecting themselves, they are also protecting others who are more susceptible to influenza infection.

Facts About the Vaccine

Influenza vaccine is safe and effective. The most common side effect is soreness at the vaccination site that can last up to two days.

It is important to remember that it is impossible to get the flu from the vaccine because it is made from killed strains of the viruses predicted to be the main causes of influenza in the coming season. The vaccine changes every year to match the prevalent strains and immunity decreases after a few months, which is why getting an annual flu shot is necessary.

Who Should Not Be Vaccinated?

The only people who should not receive influenza vaccine are those who have had previous reactions to the vaccine or people who are allergic to eggs (the viruses used in the vaccine are grown in eggs).

For Vaccine Information

For more information on influenza vaccination, contact your physician or local public health department, or visit the CDC and NFID Web site at www.cdc.gov.