

Flu Vaccine for Older Adults: A Decision Tool

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BACKGROUND

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people aged 65 years old and older get a flu (influenza) shot.

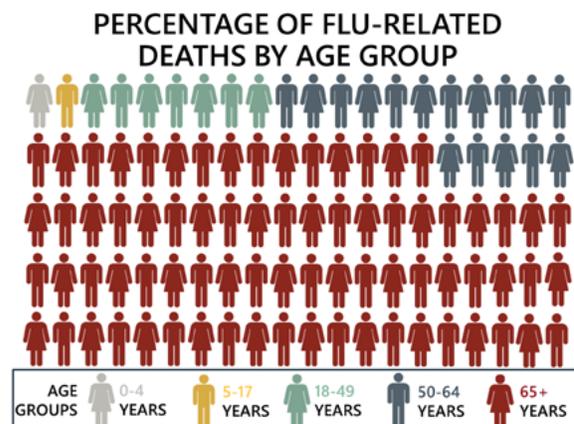
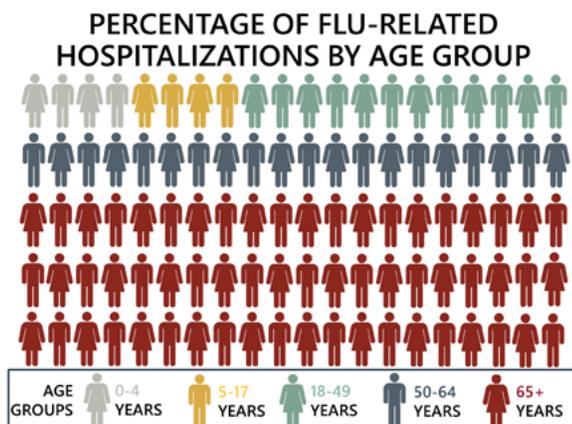
- You can get the regular vaccines that are approved for anyone aged 6 months and older, as well as vaccines that have been developed specifically for people who are 65 years old and older.
- Vaccines that have been developed for older adults are often referred to as *enhanced flu vaccines*.
- Enhanced flu vaccines provide better protection for people who are 65 years old and older compared with the regular flu vaccine.
- Similar to regular flu vaccines, enhanced flu vaccines can also cause temporary, mild side effects.

This decision support tool will explain the differences between the regular and enhanced flu vaccines. It may help you decide which vaccine is right for you.

FACTS

What to Know About Flu

- Our immune system gets weaker as we get older and it does not respond well to viruses that make us sick.
- As a result, people 65 years and older are at higher risk of developing serious complications from flu compared with younger adults.
- Most flu-related deaths and hospitalizations occur in people 65 years and older. The graphic to the left shows the percentage of flu-related hospitalizations by age group and the graphic on the right shows the percentage of flu-related deaths that occur in an average year.



Graphics created from CDC Data.

TYPES OF ENHANCED FLU VACCINES

Adjuvanted Flu Vaccine

Many vaccines have an ingredient that can create a stronger immune response to vaccination. This is called an *adjuvant*. The immune-enhancing adjuvant added to the adjuvanted flu vaccine (brand name: Fludax) is squalene oil, a naturally occurring substance found in humans, animals, and plants. In a recent review of multiple vaccine trials, older adults who received adjuvanted flu vaccine had a significantly higher immune response than those who received a regular flu vaccine. The adjuvanted vaccine was available for the first time in the United States during the 2016–2017 flu season.

High-Dose Flu Vaccine

The high-dose vaccine (brand name: Fluzone High-Dose) contains 4 times the amount of inactivated (killed) virus as the standard flu shot and produces a stronger immune response. The higher dose helps promote a better immune response and more protection for people 65 years and older. Results from a clinical trial of more than 30,000 participants showed that adults 65 years and older who received the high-dose vaccine had 24% fewer flu illnesses compared with those who received the standard-dose flu vaccine. The high-dose flu vaccine has been approved for use in the United States since 2009.

OTHER WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF GETTING THE FLU

In addition to getting a flu shot, people 65 years and older should take the same everyday precautions that CDC recommends for everyone, including avoiding close contact with people who are sick, covering coughs, and washing hands often.

DOES CDC RECOMMEND ONE TYPE OF FLU VACCINE OVER THE OTHERS?

While CDC has no recommendation of which vaccine you should get, they strongly recommend that you should get a flu vaccine every year.

Now that you've read the background information about regular and enhanced flu vaccines, go through the following 5 steps to make a decision about flu vaccination for yourself this year.

STEP 1: Identify your options

- Get an enhanced flu vaccine (adjuvanted or high dose)
- Get a regular flu vaccine
- Do not get a flu vaccine

STEP 2: Identify what is important to you

Before you make a choice about which flu vaccine to receive, please take a moment to think carefully about what is important to you. Consider how important the listed options are to you, and rate them on a scale of 1 (does not matter) to 10 (matters a lot).

	Does Not Matter								Matters a Lot	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lowering my risk of getting flu	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lowering my risk of getting others sick with flu (such as children aged 2 years or younger)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not experiencing side effects from the vaccine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Avoiding getting stuck with a needle	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Doing whatever is most convenient (for example, receiving whatever vaccine my provider has in stock)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ensuring that my copay is \$0 or as small as possible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

A note: Many insurance companies cover the cost of flu vaccines, but it's a good idea to check your individual plan to avoid a surprise bill. Ask your health insurer whether it matters if you get a vaccine in your primary care office, a pharmacy, or other location. If you don't have insurance, be sure to ask your provider about the out-of-pocket cost for the regular vaccine and the enhanced vaccine. This information may help you decide which vaccine to get.

STEP 3: Identify extra risk and risk-reducing strategies

CDC reports that older adults and people of all ages who have certain underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for having serious flu complications. Getting a flu vaccine is especially recommended for any person who has any of the conditions listed.

Check all boxes that apply to you:

- Age 65 years or older
- Asthma
- Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
- Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes)
- Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure, and coronary artery disease)
- Kidney diseases
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- Significant obesity (a body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- Weakened immune system due to disease (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or some cancers such as leukemia) or medications (such as people receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer, or those with chronic conditions requiring chronic corticosteroids or other drugs that suppress the immune system)
- Had a stroke
- Live in nursing home or other long-term care facility
- Racial or ethnic minority group at increased risk for hospitalization with flu (includes non-Hispanic Black persons; Hispanic or Latino persons; and American Indian or Alaska Native persons)
- Regular contact with children aged 2 years and younger
- Regular contact with someone who is over 65 years old (such as caregiving for an older parent, congregating at church, visiting a senior center or nursing home)

Summary of Vaccines, Benefits, and Side Effects

	Get an Enhanced Flu Vaccine	Get a Regular Flu Vaccine	Don't Get a Flu Vaccine
What is involved?	A needle and syringe will be used to give you this vaccine in your arm.	A needle and syringe will be used to give you this vaccine in your arm.	You do nothing and accept the risk that getting flu is higher when not vaccinated.
What are the benefits?	<p>Flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of having to go to the doctor with flu by 40% to 60%.</p> <p>Among adults, flu vaccination was associated with a 26% lower risk of intensive care unit (ICU) admission and a 31% lower risk of death from flu compared with those who were unvaccinated.</p> <p>Among adults hospitalized with flu, vaccinated patients were 59% less likely to be admitted to the ICU than those who had not been vaccinated. Among adults in the ICU with flu, vaccinated patients on average spent 4 fewer days in the hospital than those who were not vaccinated.</p> <p>Flu vaccines have been shown to lead to fewer heart attacks and strokes, and reduced risk of dementia after vaccines.</p> <p>Enhanced vaccines work better in people who are ages 65 years and older. Depending on the vaccine used, enhanced vaccines have higher immune response compared with regular vaccine. There are also 24% fewer flu illnesses compared with regular vaccine.</p>	<p>Flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of having to go to the doctor with flu by 40% to 60%.</p> <p>Among adults, flu vaccination was associated with a 26% lower risk of ICU admission and a 31% lower risk of death from flu compared with those who were unvaccinated.</p> <p>Among adults hospitalized with flu, vaccinated patients were 59% less likely to be admitted to the ICU than those who had not been vaccinated. Among adults in the ICU with flu, vaccinated patients on average spent 4 fewer days in the hospital than those who were not vaccinated.</p> <p>Flu vaccines have been shown to lead to fewer heart attacks and strokes, and reduced risk of dementia after vaccines.</p>	You avoid the possible side effects of a vaccine.
What are the risks and side effects?	<p>Side effects can include pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, headache, muscle ache and malaise, and typically resolve with 1 to 3 days.</p> <p>People who get enhanced flu vaccines are more likely to develop temporary, mild side effects that also can occur with regular seasonal flu shots.</p>	<p>Side effects can include pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, headache, muscle ache and malaise, and typically resolve with 1 to 3 days.</p>	You have a higher chance of getting flu symptoms, which can be serious and have long-term side effects such as pneumonia and dehydration, higher risk of heart attack and stroke, and worsening of congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

STEP 4: Evaluate where you are in the decision-making process

Which way are you leaning now?

- Getting an enhanced flu vaccine (adjuvanted or high dose)
- Getting a regular flu vaccine
- Undecided
- Not getting a flu vaccine

Do you feel as though you know enough about your flu vaccine options to make a decision?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Who else might be involved in your decision?

- Name: _____
- Is this person pressuring you? Yes/No
- What does this person want for you? (enhanced – adjuvanted or high dose, regular, no vaccine)
- How can this person support you in making a decision? _____

What other information do you need to make a decision?

- Costs associated with each vaccine and whether my insurance covers my preferred vaccine.
- Other (please specify): _____

STEP 5: Decide what's next

- I do not need to do anything else. I am ready to make my decision.
- I need to discuss my options with: _____
- I need to learn more about my options.
- Other (please specify): _____

Disclaimer: This decision support tool is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. It was designed to provide information to assist people in their decision-making process. While The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) has used the current general knowledge in the field at the date of publication and has suggested where to get more information, GSA is not liable or responsible for any injury, illness, or damages arising from use of this decision tool. It is up to each person to make your own decisions about risks to your personal health and safety; and specific, personalized advice may be obtained from your health care provider.

For additional information about regular and enhanced-dose flu vaccine, please visit:
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/different-flu-vaccines.htm>

Sources and Resources

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