

# FAQs about the FLU

## Is the flu the same thing as a cold?

No. Although both the flu and the common cold are caused by respiratory viruses, they are not the same. In general, the flu is worse than the common cold, and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and dry cough are more common and intense. Colds are usually milder than the flu. Special tests must be done to tell if a person has the flu. Symptoms of the common cold are sore throat, nasal congestion, and green or yellow mucus. A cold can last for 7-10 days, and doesn't worsen during that time. Colds generally do not result in serious health problems, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalizations. Symptoms of the flu include sudden onset of high fever greater than 101 degrees Fahrenheit, cough (usually dry), headache, body aches, muscle and joint pain, severe malaise (feeling unwell), sore throat, runny nose, vomiting, and loss of appetite.

## Can the flu be treated with antibiotics?

No. The flu is caused by viruses, and only bacteria can be killed by antibiotics. The only thing that viruses can be treated with is a prescribed antiviral medication, such as Tamiflu (oseltamivir). These medications are not used for the common cold, but can be used to treat flu illness. Antiviral medicines can reduce the severity of flu illness, reduce the length of time one is ill, and can prevent flu-related complications.

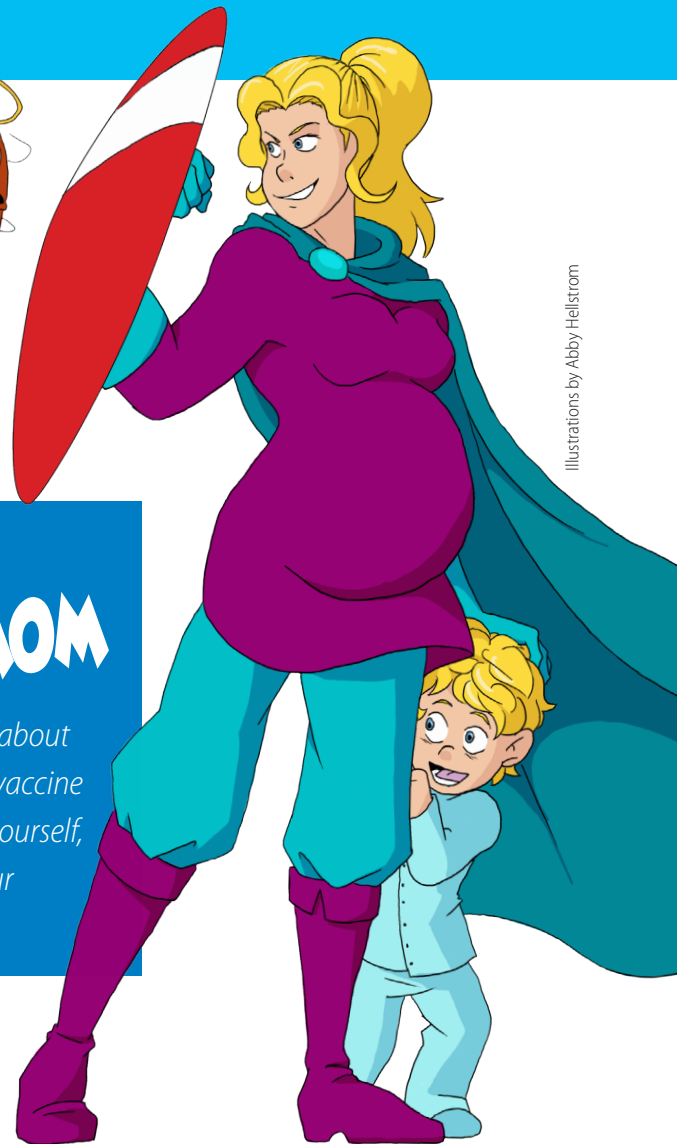
## What kind of complications can result from the flu?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems related to flu can happen at any age, but some people are at higher risk of developing serious flu-related complications if they get sick. This includes women who are pregnant, people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), young children, and people 65 years and older. These people are more likely to get flu complications that result in being hospitalized and occasionally result in death. Pneumonia,



## Be a SUPERMOM

*Knowing the facts about the flu and the flu vaccine helps you protect yourself, your baby, and your whole family.*



Illustrations by Abby Hellstrom

bronchitis, sinus infections, and ear infections are examples of flu-related complications. The flu also can make chronic health problems worse. The number of deaths can vary from year to year, from a few thousand to more than 40,000.

## Will the flu vaccine cause me to become sick with the flu?

The flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness; however, it can cause mild side effects that may be mistaken for flu. For example, people vaccinated with the flu shot may feel achy or have a low fever and may have a sore arm where the shot was given. People vaccinated with the nasal spray flu vaccine may have a stuffy nose and sore throat. These side effects are NOT the flu. If experienced at all, these effects are usually mild and last only 1-2 days.

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## How effective is the flu vaccine?

How well the flu vaccine works can range widely from season to season. How well flu vaccine works depends on various factors, including the age and health of the person being vaccinated and the similarity or “match” between the flu viruses the flu vaccine is designed to protect against, and the flu viruses spreading in the community. Flu vaccines are made every year. They are designed to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates will be most common during the coming season. Some years the vaccine is more effective than others. This means that sometimes it is possible to get the flu even after being vaccinated. Once vaccinated, your body starts to make antibodies that help protect you from the flu. It takes about 2 weeks after vaccination for the immune system to fully respond and for these antibodies to provide protection. It is also possible to have been exposed to the flu before getting vaccinated.

## Is the flu vaccine safe?

Yes. Flu vaccines are safe. The flu vaccine is thoroughly studied before it is released. The chance of serious harm or severe side effects from the flu vaccine is less than the chance of complications from being infected with the flu. The flu vaccines have been given to hundreds of millions of people for more than 50 years and have a very good safety track record. Each year, CDC works closely with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and other partners to ensure the highest safety standards for flu vaccines. Any discomfort you may feel from the minor side effects of the flu vaccine is worthwhile as compared to the suffering that can be caused by flu illness. The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. Pregnant women, young children, older people, and people with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease are at increased risk of serious flu-related complications, so getting a yearly flu vaccine is especially important for them.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

American College of Nurse-Midwives

<http://ourmomentoftruth.midwife.org/OMOT-Vaccines-for-Women>

[www.lung.org/lung-disease/influenza/preventing-influenza.html](http://www.lung.org/lung-disease/influenza/preventing-influenza.html)

[www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

[www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm092805.htm](http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm092805.htm)

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