



Target: FLU

U.S. News & World Report

Every Concern You Have About the Flu Shot – Answered

Excerpts from the article by Margaret Aldrich, M.D., in U.S. News & World Report [here](#).

Around this time every year, I'm faced with the task of explaining to patients and their families why it's important to get an annual influenza vaccine. I am an infectious diseases physician at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore in the Bronx, and I care for children who are especially vulnerable to severe illness with the influenza virus. Over the past several years of practice, I've found that immunizations are one of the health care interventions that have the greatest potential to benefit individuals and society – but also the most heavily guarded by personal belief systems. Here are some of the concerns that patients and family members have expressed to me:

"Why should I get a flu shot when I'm healthy? Even if I get the flu, I won't get that sick." We know that early childhood, older age and pregnancy are risk factors for severe influenza. We also know that certain medical condi-

The Flu: No one is immune!

Immunization facts, myths, and how to tame the flu this winter

If it's winter, it's flu season. In preparation for National Influenza Prevention Week, December 2-8, MHVC is sharing resources to promote more widespread awareness. We also asked Tawana Howard-Eddings, RN, MHVC Director of Practice Transformation, to share her perspectives on flu myths. We encourage you to use the resources of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [here](#).

tions increase a person's risk. However, it's also true that healthy people can have an overwhelming response to influenza infection and can become critically ill and even die. As health care providers, we have no way of knowing who will have this kind of a response, so we offer the best prevention we can through vaccination.

"The flu vaccine isn't even 100-percent effective, so why should I get it?" While the annual effectiveness at preventing influenza varies year to year, even a partially effective vaccine is better than no vaccine at all. Influenza vaccine must be given every year because of the change in the circulating strain. A vaccine given for one season should not be expected to provide protection for the following season.

"I don't get the flu shot because I got it a few years ago, and I still got

the flu." It takes your body about two weeks to fully develop immunity after vaccination, and you could have been exposed to the flu before you developed immunity, or the vaccine is not 100-percent effective, and you may still get the flu, but a milder illness than you would have if you didn't get the vaccine.

"I don't get the flu shot because it gives me the flu." The vaccine can cause a low-grade fever and body aches that might make you feel like you have the flu. Generally, these symptoms only last one to two days, and there is no influenza virus in your system.

"I don't get the flu shot but my kids do." While it's great that kids are being protected, we must all understand that those of us who are healthy can also carry the influenza virus and pass it

along to others. Healthy people need to get vaccinated, as well, to protect the ones we love: our children, our grandparents, our coworkers and our neighbors. So, what can you do to prevent the flu?

- Update your influenza vaccine annually.
- Practice good hand hygiene: wash with soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Teach your children proper cough etiquette: Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the elbow, not onto your bare hands.
- If you have flu-like symptoms, stay out of school or work until you are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of medication.
- If you think you might have the flu, talk to your doctor about getting tested and whether you should take anti-viral medication to treat the flu.

Flu Myths | A conversation with Tawana Eddings-Howard, RN

MHVC wants to help partners spread the word that failing to get a flu shot could be deadly. According to preliminary estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 80,000 people in the U.S. died of influenza and 900,000 people were hospitalized during the 2017-18 flu season -- the highest numbers in more than a decade.

A U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) article [here](#) identified 14 myths and misconceptions about the flu vaccine. Tawana Howard-Eddings (THE), RN, MHVC Director of Practice Transformation, has over 30 years of patient experience and she has heard them all — and has added a 15th. Read on to see if you have heard any of these from your patients:

1. The flu shot can give you the flu.

USNWR: The viruses in most versions of the flu shot are killed and are therefore inactive and can't make you sick if you get the vaccine. Most people who receive the influenza vaccine have no serious problems.

THE: This has been one of the main misconceptions that I hear from patients and employees. That's why educating the public is such a priority for MHVC.

2. It's too early or too

late to get the vaccine.

USNWR: You shouldn't think that it's ever too early or too late to get the flu vaccine. Getting it late is better than not getting it at all.

THE: MHVC is promoting national influenza week December 2-8 to help MHVC partners provide more widespread awareness. Flu season is long and sometimes goes through early Spring.

3. The flu vaccine takes effect immediately.

USNWR: It takes two weeks for the vaccine to take effect for both children and adults,

THE: The sooner you get the vaccine, the sooner you protect yourself and your family members.

4. Flu shots are only for kids and the elderly.

USNWR: If fewer people get the flu, then fewer come in contact with those who are most at risk of getting complications from influenza infections. So, flu shots are for everyone.

THE: Even healthy people get the flu and they can spread it to the most vulnerable populations, children and the elderly. We all need to do our part to stop it.

Preventing the flu is everyone's responsibility

5. Young adults and middle-age people can't die from the flu and don't need the vaccine.

USNWR: The flu affects everyone differently and can be unpredictable. Getting your flu shot is an easy way to help avoid serious complications.

THE: You never know who has a known or unknown condition that can worsen if they get the flu.

6. I can only get the flu from a contagious person.

USNWR: Flu germs can last up to 24 hours, depending on the surface they're on. The harder the surface, the longer the germs can last,

THE: Don't underestimate the importance of protecting yourself and others by handwashing or using hand sanitizers, protecting your sneeze, and using disinfectant wipes.

7. I got the flu vaccine and still got the flu, so it doesn't work.

USNWR: Even if the vaccination doesn't completely stop you from getting the flu, it can significantly reduce the severity.

THE: Vaccination can reduce the risk of hospitalization.

8. Nasal sprays are an effective alternative to the standard flu shot.

USNWR: The CDC recommends that the nasal flu vaccine be avoided by children under age 2; adults age 50 and older; pregnant women; people with weakened immune systems and patients with underlying medical records that can increase the risk of flu-related complications. This includes those with diabetes, lung disease, heart disease and kidney disease.

THE: Talk to your PCP to see what method of flu prevention is right for you.

9. You don't need to get the flu shot every year.

USNWR: Last year's flu shot will not protect you from this year's flu strains.

THE: The strains of flu can change season to season, and yearly flu shots are the most effective method we have.

10. All flu shots are equal.

USNWR: Be sure you get a flu shot from a provider that has a strong temperature monitoring program to store the vaccine.

THE: Flu vaccine needs to be refrigerated. So know the provider and assure yourself that your vaccine

Flu Myths

has been well cared for. Our MHVC partners are compliant with the quality standards for proper storage and administration of the vaccine.

11. Pregnant women shouldn't get the flu vaccine.

USNWR: Actually, getting a flu shot is especially important if you're pregnant. Because of pregnancy-related changes in the immune system, heart, and lungs, women who are expecting a child and women who just delivered (within two weeks) are more likely to get sicker from flu and suffer flu-related complications, such as hospitalization.

THE: Pregnant women should talk with their OB/Gyn about the proper time to get their flu shot.

12. If you get the flu, you can't get the flu again during that flu season.

USNWR: Different strains of the flu circulate each season, so don't assume that if you've already had the flu, you won't get it again,

THE: Getting the vaccine is not a total immunization. Plus, different flu strains pop up at different times -- but at least you will be as protected as you can be. It is important to maintain a level of awareness of your environment and the people around you. If your co-

worker, friend, or family member is sick, don't ignore it. And if you get sick, stay home!

13. If you're allergic to eggs, you can't get the flu shot.

USNWR: There are specific vaccines that are made "egg free,"

THE: Allergy to eggs is no longer an excuse!

14. I never get the flu, so I don't need a flu vaccination.

USNWR: You might have a good history, but that doesn't mean you can't get the flu,

THE: You can never say "never," especially with something as unpredictable as the flu. It is highly contagious -- if you have contact with other people or the places they have touched, you have a good chance of catching the flu.

15. Antibiotics work for the flu.

THE: Definitely not! Antibiotics don't work for viruses like colds and the flu. Using them will not make you feel better or get you back to work faster.

Antibiotics fight bacteria, so using them for the flu will put you at risk of getting a bacterial infection that is resistant to antibiotics.



Tawana Howard-Eddings, RN, is MHVC Director of Practice Transformation, and has over 30 years of patient experience. She is passionate about flu education and the flu vaccine, and how it can help save lives — beginning with MHVC, where she gives flu shots to MHVC staff.



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Flu vaccination doesn't just keep us healthy, it's a key responsibility to keep our schools, workplaces and communities healthy too. MHVC hopes you can use these tools to spread the word on the importance of the flu shot this year and in the future.. —

Allison McGuire, MPH, Executive Director, MHVC

TAKING CARE OF THE CAREGIVERS: Flu Shots for Health Care Workers

Given last season's flu illness severity and low vaccination rates, the CDC is urging facilities to boost the number of health care workers who get flu shots. **The federal goal is to have 90 percent or more of health workers vaccinated against influenza each year by 2020.** Although acute care hospitals typically get close to 90 percent, other health settings, including clinics and adult day health programs, report lower or declining rates. Nursing homes, whose frail residents are particularly vulnerable, posted a 71 percent overall vaccination rate for health care workers in 2017-2018, down from 75 percent the previous season, 73 percent in 2015-2016 and 76 percent in 2014-2015. Older adults, above age 65, accounted for 70 percent of last season's flu-related hospitalizations and 90 percent of deaths, according to the CDC.