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Wissen, was schützt.

Flu Vaccination

Protect yourself.

Annual vaccination for people over 60.





Flu is not a cold

Even though the symptoms are similar at first glance, and colloquially a simple cold is often referred to as “flu”: influenza is a much more serious disease than a cold.

GOOD TO
KNOW

Influenza is caused by so-called influenza viruses, lasts at least five to seven days in uncomplicated cases but can be accompanied by significantly more severe symptoms and lead to complications and secondary diseases. **At an older age, the risk for a severe course of the flu increases significantly.**



Typical flu symptoms:

- Sudden onset of illness with fever (≥ 38.5 °C)
- Irritating dry cough
- Headache, sore throat, aching muscles and limbs
- Fatigue, sometimes accompanied by nausea/vomiting
- Sweats

These typical symptoms develop in around one third of all cases.

A flu infection may cause complications, such as pneumonia or myocarditis. If these kinds of symptoms occur, you should see your doctor immediately.



Even if you have been vaccinated, you should consult your doctor if you notice these symptoms. Vaccination can be less effective, for example due to an impaired immune system.

Well-prepared for the flu season

As a person grows older, their immune system becomes less efficient.

This means that an older person's immune system often struggles to fight off an infection. As a consequence, they are at risk of suffering from a seasonal flu (influenza) that usually takes a more severe course, lasts longer and can be accompanied by severe, even life-threatening complications, such as pneumonia, and even take a fatal course.

Influenza causes to inflammatory processes in the body. There is evidence that this can promote heart attacks or strokes in the presence of other risk factors. This risk as a result of influenza can be reduced by the flu vaccination.

For this reason, it is especially important that older people and people with chronic illnesses are vaccinated every year against seasonal flu.

Vaccination can prevent influenza illnesses and especially severe courses of the disease. It does not protect against harmless colds.

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At the same time, individuals over the age of 60 years should also check their pneumococcal vaccine status. This is because pneumococci are frequently the cause of bacterial pneumonia. Since 2018, the German Permanent Commission on Immunisation (STIKO) has also recommended vaccination against shingles for these individuals.



A tried-and-tested approach that's always up-to-date: the vaccine

Vaccines against seasonal flu have existed for many years. They have been tested in numerous studies, and their effectiveness has been proven in millions of cases. As the flu virus can easily mutate, the vaccine is adapted every year to obtain the best possible protection.

The so-called quadrivalent vaccines protect against four different subtypes of influenza; the vaccines are adjusted anew each year to the four then most prevalent influenza variants. The use of quadrivalent vaccines against influenza has been recommended since 2018 by the Standing Committee for Vaccination (STIKO).

In older people, the immune system often reacts more weakly, so that the effect of the flu vaccination can be reduced in them. To improve effectiveness, STIKO recommends vaccination with a high-dose vaccine for people aged 60 and older.

In addition, an adjuvanted (boosted) vaccine is approved for older people.

Since influenza is a common and potentially severe disease, even with slightly better efficacy, a relevant number of influenza cases and severe courses can be additionally prevented.

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Flu vaccination cannot cause influenza. The vaccine does not contain any pathogens that can reproduce.

A flu vaccine offers no protection against the common cold.



Side effects? Virtually none!

The flu vaccine is well tolerated. Since the vaccine stimulates the body's natural defences, red- dening or swelling at the site of the injection can occur in some cases and this area may be slightly painful or sensitive.

Such local reactions occur somewhat more frequently with both high-dose and adjuvanted (boosted-action) vaccines than with conventional vaccines.

Other possible side effects are an increase in body temperature and mild general discomfort, such as a feeling of nausea. However, these symptoms subside after one to two days.

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Serious side effects, such as an immediate allergic reaction, only occur in extremely rare cases.

How to get vaccinated:

When?

Ideally, in good time before the flu season starts in October or November, as it takes up to two weeks for the body's immune protection to become fully active. If you have missed this period, it is still a good idea to get a vaccination at a later date.

Get vaccinated once a year!

A single vaccination offers enough protection for an entire flu season. Vaccination must be carried out each year with a new vaccine to protect against the influenza viruses which are predicted to be the most prevalent. Thus, you are prepared every year for the current influenza season.



A mild infection with a fever under 38.5°C is not a reason to avoid a flu vaccination.



In cases of acute illnesses requiring treatment, the vaccination should be administered two weeks after recovery at the earliest.

Where?

Flu vaccinations are generally given in general medical, internal medical or women's health practices. However, some health authorities or employers also offer this vaccination.

How much does it cost?

Health insurance companies bear the cost of flu vaccinations for all people over the age of 60 and the risk groups named below.

Always useful: practising good hygiene

Flu viruses are very infectious. Annual vaccination against flu offers the most effective form of protection. In addition, you can lower the risk of infection with some simple hygiene precautions. In this way, you can not only protect yourself and your loved ones from flu infections but also from other infectious diseases (such as gastrointestinal infections).



Hygiene tips

- Wash your hands several times a day with soap (e.g. when you come in from outdoors, after using the restroom, and before preparing and eating meals).
- Do not cough and sneeze into your hands. Instead, use the crook of your arm or a tissue.
- Use paper tissues and dispose of them after using them once.
- People with flu should not get any closer than about two metres away from people who are at increased risk.

Who should be vaccinated against flu?

The German Permanent Commission on Immunisation (STIKO) recommends vaccination against flu for the following groups of people:

- People aged 60 years or older
- Residents of retirement homes or nursing homes
- Children, adolescents and adults with an increased risk to their health as a result of an underlying illness, such as:
 - Chronic respiratory disorders
 - Heart or cardiovascular disorders
 - Liver or kidney disorders
 - Metabolic disorders, such as diabetes
 - Chronic neurological diseases, such as multiple sclerosis
 - Congenital or acquired immune deficiencies
 - HIV

- Pregnant women
- Medical staff
- Personnel in facilities that have frequent contact with the general public
- Persons who may present a potential source of infection for persons at risk living in or cared for by them in the same household.



You can find further information

on the following websites:

- www.impfen-info.de/grippe
- www.infektionsschutz.de
- www.rki.de/impfen

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