

Q&A

Influenza Vaccine

WHAT IS INFLUENZA?	Influenza (“flu”) is a viral disease with symptoms of fever, sore throat, chills, muscle aches, headache and cough. Most people are ill for only a few days, but some will get seriously ill and may need to be hospitalized. Seasonal influenza causes thousands of deaths each year, mostly among the elderly. In Japan, it is most common between November and March.
HOW IS INFLUENZA DIAGNOSED?	Symptoms of influenza are similar to the common cold and diagnosis may be difficult. A rapid diagnostic test is available using nasal or throat swabs and may be helpful in unclear cases.
WHAT IS THE INFLUENZA VACCINE?	There are many types of influenza viruses and those causing widespread disease change often. The injectable vaccine therefore changes yearly in composition, containing components of the viruses predicted to be the most common that season. This season, the vaccine contains components of two type A viruses and two type B viruses in accordance with World Health Organization recommendations. Given recent evidence of reduced effectiveness of the intranasal vaccine (FluMist), we will not be offering this version this season. Also, due to production problems, a thimerosal-free version will not be available in Japan this season.
IS THE VACCINE EFFECTIVE?	As the circulating viruses change subtly each year, the vaccine is not 100% effective in preventing disease, and some people who have been vaccinated may still get the flu. The symptoms, however, may possibly be milder and serious complications may be decreased. Protection begins about two weeks after vaccination and lasts up to six months. It is not effective against the “avian flu”, and does not protect you from the common cold.
WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED?	Current recommendations are for all persons 6 months or older to receive this season’s vaccine.
WHO SHOULD NOT GET VACCINATED?	People with: 1) a history of severe allergic reaction to eggs or a previous dose of influenza vaccine 2) a history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome 3) high fever or severe illness at the time of vaccination.
WHEN IS THE VACCINE GIVEN?	The vaccine is generally available beginning in October. Vaccination before the end of the year is recommended, although vaccination later in the season may still be helpful.
HOW MANY SHOTS ARE GIVEN?	Most people need only one dose per season. The CDC in America recommends that children under 9 years who have not received two or more doses of vaccine prior to July 2016, receive 2 doses this season. Otherwise, only one dose is needed. Authorities in Japan recommend that all those younger than 13 years should receive two doses regardless of past vaccination history.
ARE THERE ANY RISKS?	Serious problems with the vaccine are rare. Soreness, redness, swelling at the shot site is common for 1-2 days. A mild fever may also occur. Severe allergic reactions are possible but quite rare, usually occurring several minutes to hours after the shot.
WHAT IS THE COST?	The fee for this year’s injectable vaccine is ¥3,500 for those 13 years and older and ¥3,000 for those 6 months to 12 years of age. Those between 1 and 15 years or over 65 years of age may be eligible for vaccination at a reduced cost depending of their area of residence.
CAN INFLUENZA BE TREATED?	Several antiviral medications are available for the treatment of influenza in oral, inhalation and intravenous forms. Medications given within 48 hours of onset may reduce the duration of illness by approximately one day and possibly prevent severe complications of influenza. Most healthy persons, however, will recover without the use of antiviral medications.