



MAG Fact Sheet

Influenza & Influenza Vaccination

Influenza is a viral illness. Flu symptoms include high fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, and muscle aches. Most people get better in a few days, but the flu can lead to pneumonia and other serious and potentially deadly complications. The numbers can differ dramatically from year-to-year, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 80,000 people died and 900,000 were hospitalized as a result of flu in the U.S. during the 2017-2018 flu season.

The flu's most vulnerable populations include the young, the elderly, and those with chronic medical conditions (e.g., asthma, heart or lung disease, diabetes, cancer, and immune system problems). Women who are pregnant are also at high risk of serious flu complications.

Every patient who is six months old or older should get the flu vaccine every year. Babies who are younger than six months old aren't vaccinated because the vaccine is ineffective for them, so it is essential for everyone who spends time with these children to be vaccinated. And pregnant women should be vaccinated because their antibodies are passed on to their babies – helping protect them from the flu in their first few months of life.

The flu season varies each year, but patients should get vaccinated by the end of October. The flu season normally peaks in January or February. It takes time for the antibodies to develop in a patient's body once they have been vaccinated – so it can take up to two weeks before they achieve the maximum level of protection. Children who are between six months and eight years old who are getting vaccinated for the first time need to get two doses of the vaccine administered at least four weeks apart.

There are anti-viral medicines that a patient can get to reduce the severity and duration of the flu – even if they have been vaccinated – but these are most effective if they are administered in the first day or two of the first flu symptoms. An egg allergy is no longer a contraindication to flu vaccination. And patients should ideally discuss their flu vaccination options with their primary care physician as a part of their overall health maintenance program.

In addition to getting vaccinated, the best ways to prevent the flu include using a hand sanitizer and thoroughly washing your hands with soap or an alcohol-based rub on a regular basis; covering your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze; avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth; cleaning your living and work space surfaces on a regular basis; avoiding contact with others if you have the flu; and, staying at home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone – unless you require medical care.

Go to www.flu.gov or www.cdc.gov/flu or dph.georgia.gov/influenza-what-you-need-know for additional information on the flu and flu vaccines. Click here to watch a 'Move the Needle' video that was produced by Sandra Fryhofer, M.D., to increase vaccination rates in Georgia.

Updated August 8, 2019.