

# FACES OF



# INFLUENZA

American Lung Association's  
Influenza Prevention Program

In collaboration with sanofi pasteur

# MYTHS & FACTS About Influenza

We all know someone who needs to be immunized against influenza this year. In fact, it is likely that you or someone in your family fall into one of the groups that health-care officials recommend to receive an influenza immunization. Many misconceptions about the influenza virus and influenza vaccine persist, despite the widespread impact of the disease and the benefit of the vaccine.

**MYTH:** Influenza is no more than a nuisance, much like the common cold, that cannot be prevented.

**FACT:** Influenza, commonly referred to as the “flu,” is a severe and sometimes life-threatening disease. Influenza and its related complications cause an average of 36,000 deaths and approximately 226,000 hospitalizations in the US each year. You can avoid getting influenza by getting vaccinated each year.<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH:** You can get influenza from the injectable vaccination.

**FACT:** The injectable vaccine does not contain any of the live virus so it is impossible to get influenza from the vaccine. Side effects may occur in some people, such as mild soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site, headache, or a low-grade fever. Vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent influenza and its complications.<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH:** It is not necessary to get immunized against influenza every year because protection lasts from previous vaccinations.

**FACT:** The types of influenza viruses circulating in the community change from year to year. Because of this, a new vaccine is made each year to protect against the current strains. Also, immunity to influenza viruses only lasts for a year, so it is important to get vaccinated against influenza every year.

**MYTH:** People shouldn't be immunized against influenza if they are sick.

**FACT:** Minor illnesses with or without fever should not prevent vaccination, especially in children with mild upper respiratory infections (colds) or upper respiratory allergies. In addition, people with chronic illnesses, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease have a higher risk for contracting the influenza virus and for developing complications. These individuals should be immunized each year. Individuals with severe allergies to eggs or those who have had a previous vaccine-associated allergic reaction should avoid immunization. Talk to your health-care provider for more information.<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH:** Only the elderly are at risk for developing serious complications from the influenza virus.

**FACT:** Influenza impacts people of all ages. Each year, more than 226,000 Americans are hospitalized and about 36,000 die from influenza-related complications, including an average of 92 children under 5 years of age.<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH:** I missed the chance to get an influenza vaccination in the fall, so now I have to wait until next year.

**FACT:** Annual immunization is the best way to protect against influenza. We at the American Lung Association urge you and your loved ones to get vaccinated as soon as you can, whenever that is during the influenza season. Vaccination typically begins in October and can continue through March. In most seasons, influenza virus activity doesn't peak until February or March. You should talk to your health-care provider for more information about the importance of influenza immunization.<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH:** I seem to get the stomach flu each year. My friend told me the influenza vaccine might prevent the stomach flu next year.

**FACT:** Unlike most other common respiratory and stomach infections that are often referred to as “the flu,” influenza can cause more severe illness and can result in complications leading to hospitalization and death, especially among the elderly. Common symptoms of influenza infection include a high fever (101°F-102°F) that begins suddenly, sore throat, chills, cough, headache, and muscle aches. The influenza vaccine protects you against the influenza virus but not against viral gastroenteritis, which is the correct term to use when referring to the “stomach flu.”<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH:** If I receive an annual influenza vaccination, I am also protected against avian flu.

**FACT:** An annual influenza vaccination is designed to protect against the strains of influenza circulating that year. The seasonal influenza vaccine is not designed to protect against avian or bird flu. While there has been a recent focus on bird flu, seasonal influenza infection currently poses a far greater danger to Americans. Seasonal influenza kills and hospitalizes hundreds of thousands of people each year. Seasonal influenza infection may be prevented through vaccination.<sup>1</sup>

**The CDC recommends the influenza vaccine every year for the following groups:<sup>1</sup>**

- Adults and children with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, weakened immune system, diabetes, and others
- Children 6 – 59 months of age
- Children 6 months – 18 years of age who are on long-term aspirin treatment
- Women who are pregnant during the influenza season
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of persons at high-risk, including children younger than 6 months of age who are too young to be vaccinated. This includes parents, grandparents, siblings, babysitters, and daycare providers.
- Adults 50 years of age and older
- Residents of long-term care facilities and nursing homes
- Health-care personnel who come in contact with patients
- Anyone, including school-aged children, who wants to prevent influenza

Note: Children under 9 years of age receiving an influenza vaccination for the first time need two doses approximately 1 month apart.<sup>1</sup>

To ensure families everywhere understand the risks of influenza, the American Lung Association has joined with Jennifer Garner, actress and mother, and Admiral John O. Agwunobi, Assistant Secretary of Health as well as everyday people to launch a national public educational initiative called the *Faces of Influenza*. To learn more about the program, influenza and vaccination, visit [www.facesofinfluenza.org](http://www.facesofinfluenza.org).

**Reference**

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention and Control of Influenza: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), 2007. *MMWR*. 2007;56(RR-6):1-60

