



Bundesinstitut für
Öffentliche Gesundheit

ROBERT KOCH INSTITUT



Flu Vaccines

Effective protection against severe flu illnesses
for people aged 60 and over



infektionsschutz.de
Wissen, was schützt.

Who is the flu vaccine for?

People aged 60 and over have an increased risk of becoming seriously ill with flu. **Vaccination** against seasonal flu (influenza) **has been proven to lower the risk of experiencing severe symptoms**. From the age of 60, it is therefore recommended that you have an annual flu vaccination in the autumn.

What is flu and what symptoms might you experience?

Flu is an **infectious disease caused by influenza viruses**. It can be severe or even life-threatening and may result in complications such as pneumonia. Around 2 out of 3 people develop symptoms after being infected with flu. These symptoms usually start suddenly, approximately one to two days after infection.

Typical symptoms include:

- ▶ high temperature (fever)
- ▶ dry cough
- ▶ bad headaches and aching limbs
- ▶ general sensation of being ill and tired

Every third person will not experience symptoms once they are infected, but can still infect other people.

How can you become infected with a flu virus?



Flu viruses are mainly transmitted **by droplets when coughing, sneezing or talking**. If droplets that carry the flu virus come into contact with the mucous membranes of the nose, mouth or eyes, then you can become infected.



It is also possible to transmit flu viruses on **the hands or shared surfaces**, such as door handles.

You can still catch the flu even if you have had a flu vaccine.

Who should be vaccinated against the flu?

The **Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO)** recommends that the following groups of people, among others, should have an annual flu vaccination:

- ▶ People aged 60 and over
- ▶ People with chronic illnesses
- ▶ People who are pregnant
- ▶ Residents of retirement and nursing homes
- ▶ Close contacts of people in risk groups
- ▶ Medical staff

Why is it important for people aged 60 and over to have a flu vaccination?

As people get older, their immune system becomes weaker and it is no longer as effective at fighting off pathogens. **People aged 60 and over are therefore at higher risk of becoming seriously ill with the flu.** Flu can more frequently result in various complications for people in this age group, such as pneumonia.

Older people who catch flu are more likely to be admitted to hospital and are at an increased risk of dying from the illness. By getting vaccinated, you will help to prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed during a flu epidemic.



There is increasing amounts of evidence to prove that flu increases the risk of cardiovascular complications. **According to studies, having a flu vaccine will help to protect against heart attacks and strokes.**

Why are flu vaccines available that have improved efficacy?

Older people have a weaker immune system. This means that they do not react as strongly as younger people to the flu vaccine. STIKO therefore recommends that people aged 60 and over are given vaccines that result in a stronger immune response. These include **high-dose vaccines** and **boosted (adjuvanted) vaccines**. Studies have shown that they **work slightly better than standard vaccines**.

Why should you be vaccinated against flu every year?

Flu viruses are constantly changing. The **vaccines are therefore adapted each year**. The vaccines contain ingredients of the different viral variants that are most likely to be found over the coming season. Furthermore, protection from the vaccine only lasts for a limited time. For the best possible protection, you should be vaccinated every year.

When should you get vaccinated?

The best time to get the flu vaccine is **from October to mid-December**. This means you have enough time to build up sufficient protection before the seasonal flu epidemic begins. It can also be useful to be vaccinated at a later stage.

Covid-19 and pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for people over the age of 60. **Vaccination against RSV** is also recommended if you have a serious underlying illness or you live in a care facility or nursing home. In addition, the vaccine should be made available to all people who are aged 75 and over.

For people aged 60 and over, statutory health insurance generally covers the costs of the flu vaccination.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

The flu vaccine is **well tolerated and safe**. After being vaccinated, you may experience some of the usual reactions to having a vaccine, such as pain at the injection site, tiredness or a slight feeling of being ill. Severe side effects are very rare.



Reactions to vaccines may take place a little more frequently and you may experience a stronger reaction if you are having a boosted efficacy flu vaccine, rather than a standard vaccine. The symptoms of the reaction will usually subside after one to three days.

How else can you help to protect yourself?

Having a flu vaccine means you will be well protected against severe symptoms of the illness. However, it does not offer complete protection. By following **simple hygiene measures**, you can protect both yourself and other people from flu viruses and other infectious respiratory diseases.

Important hygiene tips



Keep your distance



Pay attention to hygiene when coughing and sneezing



Thoroughly ventilate spaces on a regular basis



Wash your hands regularly as part of your everyday routine



Cover your mouth and nose with a mask if necessary



Avoid contact with others



Stay at home if you are unwell



Keep your hands away from your face

You can read more information about flu and how you can protect yourself at www.infektionsschutz.de and www.rki.de/influenza-impfung.

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Further information about the flu vaccine:

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