

## Flu Vaccines – Dr. Charles P. Catania, MD

The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones against influenza (flu) is to get a flu vaccine every flu season. Flu is a contagious respiratory disease that can lead to serious illness, hospitalization, or even death. The CDC recommends everyone six months and older get an annual flu vaccine.

### Why is it important to get a flu vaccine EVERY year?

- Flu viruses are constantly changing, so flu vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the viruses that research suggests will be common during the upcoming flu season.
- Your protection from a flu vaccine declines over time. Yearly vaccination is needed for the best protection.

### Is the flu vaccine safe?

Flu vaccines have a good safety record. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines over the past 50 years. Extensive research supports the safety of seasonal flu vaccines. Each year, CDC works with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other partners to ensure the highest safety standards for flu vaccines.

### What are the side effects of flu vaccines?

**Flu shots:** Flu shots are made using killed flu viruses (for inactivated vaccines), or without flu virus at all (for the recombinant vaccine). So, you cannot get flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that may occur include soreness, redness and/or swelling where the shot was given, low grade fever, and aches.

**Nasal spray flu vaccines:** The viruses in nasal spray flu vaccines are weakened and do not cause the severe symptoms often associated with influenza illness. For adults, side effects from the nasal spray may include runny nose, headache, sore throat, and cough. For children, side effects may also include wheezing, vomiting, muscle aches, and fever.

If these problems occur, they are usually mild and go away on their own, but serious reactions are also possible. Almost all people who receive flu vaccine have no serious problems from it.

### Flu Vaccine Myths:

#### 1. **Flu virus is not serious:**

**Fact:** As many as 650,000 people a year can die of the flu. This only represents respiratory deaths, so the likely impact is even higher. Even healthy people can get the flu, but especially people whose immune systems are vulnerable. Most people will recover within a few weeks, but some can develop complications including sinus and ear infections, pneumonia, heart, or brain inflammations.

#### 2. **Flu vaccine can give me the flu:**

**Fact:** The injected flu vaccine contains an inactivated virus that cannot give you influenza. If you feel achy or slightly feverish, it is a normal reaction of the immune system to the vaccine, and generally lasts only a day or two.

#### 3. **Flu vaccine can cause severe side effects:**

**Fact:** The flu vaccine is proven to be safe. Severe side effects are extremely rare. One in a million people may get Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), which causes muscle weakness and paralysis.

#### 4. **I got the vaccine in the past and I still got the flu, it doesn't work:**

**Fact:** Several flu viruses are circulating all the time, which is why people may still get the flu despite being vaccinated since the vaccine is specific to one strain. However, being vaccinated improves the chance of being protected from the flu. This is especially important to stop the virus affecting people with vulnerable immune systems.

**5. I am pregnant I shouldn't get the flu vaccine:**

**Fact:** Pregnant women should especially get the flu vaccine since their immune systems are weaker than usual. The inactivated flu vaccine is safe at any stage of pregnancy.

Dr. Charles P. Catania, is the Chief Medical Officer for PentaHealth, he is Board Certified in Family Medicine and Hospice Medicine. He received his medical degree from the American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine; medically trained in England; and completed residency at Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, where he was named Chief Resident in 2009 and served on the New Jersey Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors.

Dr. Catania has been in a private practice setting since 2010 and has been named "Readers' Choice Top Doc" in South Jersey Magazine in August 2013, and "Top Doc" by his peers in Mainline Today Magazine in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Dr. Catania has an interest in all facets of family medicine. He enjoys spending time and getting to know his patients on a personal level and providing care when they need it most. He loves working our walk-in hours and in our PentaHealth Today clinic on Sundays.

He treasures time with his wife and children, and he takes pride in bringing a very personal and friendly experience when caring for his patients here at PentaHealth.



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