

a healthy conversation

Don't let the flu get the best of you!

Add this to your line of defense

From Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield

Influenza is a respiratory infection that can lead to serious complications, especially in young children, older adults or those with preexisting medical conditions. Besides regularly practicing good health habits, annual flu shots help prevent the flu and its complications. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone six months of age and older get a flu vaccine every year.

- **Why do I have to get one every year?** A new flu vaccine comes out every year because influenza virus strains are very adaptable and can evolve quickly. Annual vaccines are created to keep up with these changes — last year's vaccine may not protect you against this year's virus.

- **How does it work?** The most common flu vaccine is the shot. A flu shot contains an inactive or killed virus. The killed virus won't cause you to get the flu, but creates antibodies that will remember the strain and protect your body against it throughout the season.
- **When should I get vaccinated?** It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop and protect your body. That's why it's better to get vaccinated early in the fall, before flu season has a chance to set in.

The CDC found the annual flu vaccine is 71 percent effective in reducing flu-related hospitalizations in all ages, and it's proven even more effective in younger children and older adults.

One flu shot doesn't protect against all sickness. Maintaining good hygiene is your first line of defense against contagious illness such as the common cold, flu and other viruses. To practice preventive healthy habits:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth when possible;
- Practice overall good health habits such as getting plenty of sleep, exercising regularly, keeping hydrated, eating a nutritious diet and managing stress.

To locate a health care facility or a doctor to administer the flu vaccine, use the Find a Doctor tool on Wellmark.com.

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