

Busting common myths about the flu vaccine

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(Medical Xpress)—With cold and flu season upon us, many companies have geared up for what is predicted to be a busy flu season producing 150 million doses of the influenza vaccine, up 17 million from last year.

"This is a pretty busy time around here," said Dennis Cunningham, MD a physician in [Infectious Diseases](#) at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "Our [emergency department](#), urgent care centers and our inpatient numbers always go up because of the [flu](#), although many of those patients could avoid getting sick by practicing just a few simple precautions."

Dr. Cunningham, also a faculty member at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, said that part of the problem is many people buy into the long-held myths about the [flu vaccine](#) and miss opportunities to avoid getting sick. He says following about some of the most common

myths:

Myth: You can actually catch the flu from the flu vaccine.

"This is probably the most common myth out there, but it's simply not true," said Dr. Cunningham. "The [vaccine](#) can give you some mild symptoms, you may feel a bit achy and your arm may be a little tender where you first get the shot. But that's actually a good thing and shows that the vaccine is working. It tells us your body is responding appropriately to the vaccine."

Dr. Cunningham said that nobody should confuse a few slight symptoms with the actual flu. The vaccine may leave you feeling a bit warm or achy for a day or two, but with true influenza, someone is sick and in bed for a week with [high fever](#).

It is especially important for children to get the [flu shot](#), or flu mist, which works just as well. Because children are around so many people – from peers to teachers, siblings to adults and grandparents – children are the biggest carriers of the flu and giving them the vaccine can protect a wide range of people.

Myth: You should wait until it is cold outside to get your flu vaccine.

"Some people are worried that if you get the vaccine too soon, it will wear off by the time winter gets here," said Dr. Cunningham. "The truth is vaccinating people even in August will protect them throughout the entire [flu season](#). This also includes the elderly who typically have been the group people are most worried about."

Myth: The flu is only spread by sneezing.

"Germs are pretty easy to pass around and flu is really contagious," said Dr. Cunningham. "It's very easy for one child to give it to another child and the next thing you know, they bring it home."

Because of that, experts say it is important to wash and sanitize your hands often during flu season, and urge children to do the same. The easiest way is to use hand gels, but make sure they contain at least 65 to 95 percent alcohol. If soap and water are nearby, that is even better for protecting against germs. Wash often and lather up. Make sure to completely rinse your hands in order to get the soap and germs off.

Myth: Flu vaccines do not protect you from current strains.

From the H1N1 scare in 2009 to swine flu and the bird flu, each year it seems there is a new strain making headlines. But researchers track the most recent, most dangerous strains, and work to stay one step ahead of it.

"The World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pick the strains they think are most likely to circulate in the coming months so that people are protected against everything that may go around," said Dr. Cunningham. "Every year there are two A strains and one B strain of influenza included in the vaccine."

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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