

Why People Don't Get Vaccinated

(and ways to persuade them to!)

1. I don't need the flu vaccine. If I do get the flu, I'll just take the new flu medication.

The new antiviral medications prescribed for flu do not eliminate flu symptoms. According to the medical literature, they have the ability to reduce the severity of the flu somewhat, and may shorten the duration by only about three days. They will not stop the flu dead in its tracks, like a cough suppressant relieves a cough. Moreover, patients who have taken these medications inappropriately have been known to suffer severe side effects.

2. I'm not in a high-risk group.

You may not be in a high-risk group, but your patients are, and members of your family may be. If you get the flu, you put people around you at high risk for serious illness. You can help ensure that they stay healthy this winter.

3. If my patients get the flu vaccine, then I don't need to.

Can you be sure that they did get the flu vaccine? What if they didn't? Remember, even if they did, the vaccine is 70-90% effective. In frail elderly, effectiveness may be as low as 30%. Getting the flu shot will add an extra level of certainty that you will not get the flu, and will not pass it on to your patients and family.

4. The flu vaccine causes Guillain-Barré Syndrome.

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) was associated with the swine flu in 1976 but has not been clearly linked to flu vaccines. The CDC states, however, that "if there is a risk of GBS from current influenza vaccines it is estimated at one or two cases per million persons vaccinated." So the benefits of getting vaccinated greatly outweigh the risks involved.

5. I'm healthy and never get the flu.

Absolutely anyone can get the flu. Why chance it?

6. I got vaccinated last year.

Strains of the flu virus change every year, and new vaccines are produced to counter them as soon as they are identified. In addition, the vaccine loses its potency after a year. So, the vaccination you had last year will not be effective against this year's virus.

7. I will get sick from the flu vaccine.

There's no live virus in the injectable vaccine, so you can't get the flu from the shot. You might get a low-grade fever and muscle aches that last about a day or two. Remember, the vaccine can take up to two weeks to become completely effective, so you could still get the flu during these two weeks. If you get the flu after this period, you may experience milder symptoms than if you had not had the immunization.

8. The flu can't be all that bad. After all, it's just a really bad cold.

The flu can be very serious. Approximately 36,000 people die from the flu and flu-related complications in the U.S. each year. Ninety-five percent of these deaths occur in individuals age 65 and older. The flu shot protects you, and it will help keep you from spreading it to individuals in this vulnerable age category.

9. My doctor didn't recommend it.

All major health organizations and the CDC recommend that all individuals working in the health care environment get vaccinated annually.

10. I already had the flu!

Are you sure you didn't have a bad cold? The flu will keep you in bed with a sudden onset of high fever, severe body aches, backaches and headaches for days or even weeks. It will keep you from working and carrying out daily activities.