



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Department of Public Health*

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## **Questions & Answers about the Nasal Spray Flu Vaccine**

### **What is the nasal spray flu vaccine?**

There are two types of flu vaccine: the flu shot which is given with a needle in the arm, and the nasal spray which is sprayed into the nose. The nasal spray is sometimes called LAIV for “live attenuated influenza vaccine.” “Attenuated” means weakened. The nasal spray flu vaccine is made with live, weakened flu virus and is sprayed into the nose. It was first approved for seasonal flu in 2003, and millions of doses of the vaccine have been given in the United States.

### **Is the nasal spray flu vaccine safe?**

Yes, the nasal spray flu vaccine is safe.

### **Is the nasal spray flu vaccine effective?**

Yes, the nasal spray flu vaccine is as effective as the flu shot.

### **Does the nasal spray flu vaccine contain thimerosal?**

No, neither the seasonal nor the H1N1 nasal spray flu vaccines contain thimerosal or any other preservative.

### **Can the nasal spray flu vaccine give you the flu?**

No. The viruses in the nasal spray flu vaccine cannot cause the flu.

### **Who can be vaccinated with the nasal spray flu vaccine?**

The nasal spray flu vaccine is recommended for use in healthy people 2 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

### **Who should *not* be vaccinated with the nasal spray flu vaccine?**

- People younger than 2 years of age;
- Pregnant women;
- People 50 years of age and older;
- People with a medical condition that places them at higher risk for complications from influenza;
- Children younger than 5 years old with a history of recurrent wheezing;
- Children or adolescents receiving aspirin therapy;
- People who have had Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), a rare disorder of the nervous system, within 6 weeks of getting a flu vaccine;
- People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs or who are allergic to any of the nasal spray vaccine components.

### **Are there side effects with the nasal spray flu vaccine?**

In some children, side effects may include fever, runny nose and headache. Occasionally, muscle aches, vomiting and wheezing may occur. In adults, side effects include runny/stuffy

nose, headache, sore throat, and cough. Fever is not a common side effect in adults. Any side effects that may arise are mild and short-lasting when compared to the symptoms of flu itself. Life-threatening allergic reactions are very rare. If they do occur, it is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

### **If the nasal spray flu vaccine is safe, why can't everybody get it?**

The nasal spray vaccine is not licensed for everybody. At this time it is approved for healthy people age 2 through 49. In the future it may be approved for more people.

### **Can people who get the nasal spray flu vaccine spread the virus to others and make them sick?**

It is very rare for people to spread vaccine viruses to close contacts. The risk that someone will get infected after close contact with a person that has been vaccinated with the nasal spray flu vaccine is extremely low.

### **Can health care providers get the nasal spray flu vaccine?**

Yes, the nasal spray flu vaccine is a good option for most health care providers who are healthy, younger than 50 years old, and not pregnant. As a precaution, healthcare workers who receive the nasal spray flu vaccine should not provide care for patients with **severely** weakened immune systems that are **being cared for in a protective environment** (for example, bone marrow transplant unit) for at least 7 days after vaccination. Although no patients with weakened immune systems have been harmed by use of the nasal spray vaccine among health care workers, the recommendation is intended as an extra precaution.

### **Can family members of a pregnant woman receive the nasal spray flu vaccine?**

Pregnant women should not receive nasal spray for the seasonal or H1N1 flu vaccines, but it is okay for a pregnant woman to be around a family member or other close contact who has received nasal spray flu vaccine. The nasal spray flu vaccine is safe for women after they have delivered, even if they are breastfeeding their infant.

### **Is the nasal spray flu vaccine safe to use in school settings?**

Yes. Students who receive the nasal spray vaccine will not give the flu to a schoolmate, even if a student has an underlying illness such as asthma or a compromised immune system.

### **Does the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) recommend the nasal spray flu vaccines?**

Yes, the vaccines can and should be used in everyone except for those groups mentioned above. It is a safe and effective way to prevent flu.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- Call 211 or 1-877-211-MASS (6277). Interpreter services are available in many languages.
- Call your doctor, nurse or clinic, or your local board of health
- Call the DPH Immunization Program at (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at (888) 658-2850
- Visit the DPH website at [www.mass.gov/flu](http://www.mass.gov/flu)
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)
- Visit the MassPRO Public Flu Clinic Finder website at: <http://flu.masspro.org/>