

## HEALTH

## Fall in Line for a Flu Shot

## Making your family health a priority

BY DR. ROGER MULLER

The leaves are changing colors, stores shelves are filling with seasonal decorations and evening temperatures are dipping into the 40s. Fall has arrived in Oregon, and that means it's also the beginning of flu season.

Influenza is a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death. The best way to protect yourself and reduce your chances of getting the flu this year is to get a flu vaccine.



According to the Centers for Disease Control, everyone who is at least 6 months of age should get a flu vaccine. It is increasingly important to get vaccinated for people who have certain medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes or chronic lung disease,

pregnant women, young children under 5 and people 65 and older.

Despite the evidence and recommendations, hundreds of thousands of Oregonians won't get vaccinated this year. Not only

does that put your own personal health and well-being at risk, but it increases the chances of your family, friends, co-workers and neighbors getting sick too.

Consider the following: Getting the shot will not give you the flu.

According to the CDC, the flu shot vaccine is made with either inactivated flu viruses (and therefore not infectious) or with no flu vaccine viruses at all. Many people report experiencing flu-like symptoms after getting the vaccine, such as muscle pain or weakness, but these symptoms go away after a day or two, and are much less severe than the actual flu.

Influenza does not discriminate

against age or healthy habits. Just because you're young or don't typically get sick doesn't mean you can't catch the flu. According to the CDC, people who have the flu can spread it to others from as far as six feet away. You can also catch the flu from someone who has yet to exhibit any signs or symptoms of being sick.

In most cases, the cost of a flu shot is covered by your health insurance plan, whether you buy health insurance on your own or are covered through your employer, through Medicare or Medicaid. More employers are now offering free onsite flu shot clinics at the office. If you get the flu, the costs of treating it and the

potential for missed days of work or school far exceed the cost of the vaccination.

Getting a flu shot takes no more than five minutes. Most neighborhood pharmacies even offer walk-in options, so you don't need to make an appointment. If you are unemployed or your employer doesn't offer flu shots, you can go to your primary care doctor or nearby wellness clinic, most retail pharmacies or contracted flu shot providers.

To find a list of flu shot providers near you, visit [public.health.oregon.gov](http://public.health.oregon.gov).

Dr. Roger Muller is chief medical officer with UnitedHealthcare Pacific Northwest.

## Gunshot Injuries to Children Studied

A research team led by Oregon Health & Science University and the University of California, Davis, reveals that childhood gunshot injuries, while uncommon, are more severe, require more major surgery, have greater mortality and higher per-patient costs than any other mechanism for childhood injury — particularly among adolescent males.

Previous studies on gunshot injuries in children have focused almost exclusively on mortality. This study is one of few to include the much broader number of children affected by gunshot injuries and served by 911 emergency services, both in-hospital and out-

of-hospital measures of injury severity, and children with gunshot injuries treated outside major trauma centers.

The researchers reviewed data from nearly 50,000 injured children aged 19 and younger for whom 9-1-1 emergency medical services were activated over a three-year period in Portland, Vancouver, Seattle, Sacramento, Calif., Santa Clara, Calif., and Denver.

The research team looked at the number of injuries, severity of injury, type of hospital interventions, patient deaths and costs-per-patient in children with gunshot injuries compared with chil-

dren whose injuries resulted from other mechanisms, including stabbing, being hit by a motor vehicle, struck by blunt object, falls, motor vehicle crashes and others.

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