

A flu vaccine may protect your heart, too

25 September 2017, by Laura Dawahare

Flu season and more importantly, flu shot season is here. It's common knowledge that the flu vaccine prevents the misery of influenza and helps protect vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, young children, and the chronically ill. But did you know that getting a flu shot might also prevent a heart attack or stroke?

Influenza, typically called flu, is a highly contagious respiratory viral infection easily spread from person to person when [people](#) with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. Flu can cause high – sometimes dangerous – fevers, chills, sore throat, cough, congestion, muscle or body aches and headaches. Some people, commonly children, may also have vomiting and diarrhea. And flu can be dangerous: according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as many as 49,000 flu-related deaths occur each year.

While anyone can have complications from the flu, people with cardiovascular problems are at higher risk to develop them, which can lead to respiratory failure, pneumonia, [heart attack](#) and/or stroke, and can also worsen pre-existing conditions like [heart failure](#), diabetes, or lung disease, including asthma.

A study published in the prestigious medical journal *JAMA* found that getting a [flu vaccine](#) reduced the risk of heart attack, stroke, heart failure or other major cardiac event—including death—by about a third over the following year. It's possible, though not yet proven, that flu increases the risk of a clot forming in blood vessels and/or that [flu virus](#) can provoke inflammatory changes in the [blood vessels](#) that contribute to heart attacks.

The best way to prevent influenza is to get vaccinated every year. The CDC recommends that everyone six months and older get a flu vaccine every fall. While most people have no side effects from the vaccine, some people might develop a mild fever, muscle aches, or mild arm soreness. Many people claim that the flu vaccine actually causes the flu; this is simply not so.

Everyday preventive actions, such as avoiding close contact with infected people, covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and frequent handwashing are also recommended to help reduce the spread of germs that cause the flu.

It is important to remember that the more people get vaccinated against the flu, the fewer people will be likely to have it, so by lowering your own risk you are also lowering the risk for those around us – your children, your grandchildren, your co-workers and friends.

And finally, if you have a higher risk for heart attack or stroke, talk to your doctor about whether a flu vaccine is a wise choice for additional, potentially life-saving protection.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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