

MONEY MATTERS

Getting a flu shot? There are several new options

By Linda A. Johnson
Of The Associated Press

Individuals who are planning to get a flu shot this season will have several options to discuss with their doctors.

Three vaccines may appeal to those who are squeamish about the inch-long needles typically used to give flu shots. Another option provides a high dosage for anyone needing extra protection. There's even a shot for people with egg allergies.

And for the first time, most flu shots will protect against four strains of the influenza virus, which kills about 25,000 Americans each year, instead of just three. That reduces the chance that vaccines won't protect against all the major strains circulating.

That's what happened last year, making the already-prepared vaccines only 23 percent effective — far below the typical 50-70 percent range.

Doctors recommend everyone aged 6 months and older get a flu vaccine. To determine the best option, people can talk to a health care professional or visit www.flu.gov.

Dr. Amesh Adalja, a member of the public health committee at the Infectious Diseases Society of America, recommends a vaccine covering four flu strains, or, for seniors, a high-dose vaccine. But doctors say people shouldn't delay getting vaccinated because their preferred option isn't available immediately. It takes two weeks after vaccination to build up immunity.

Most flu vaccines, which

can be taken by nearly everyone, are covered by private and government health insurance. And prices generally range between \$32 and \$40 at major drugstore chains for those paying out of pocket.

Here are this year's options:

Have a needle phobia?

- FluMist, MedImmune's nasal spray vaccine, is approved for people ages 2 to 49, and it protects against four strains. It's made from live, weakened, influenza virus, rather than killed virus like other vaccines. Because of the remote chance FluMist could trigger the flu in vulnerable people, it's not recommended for anyone who has a weakened immune system or lives with someone who does; people with diabetes or heart, kidney or lung conditions; pregnant or nursing women, children ages 2 to 17 who've taken aspirin; or anyone with a severe egg allergy.

Because there's no needle involved, it's preferred by parents, Hirsch said.

- Fluzone maker Sanofi SA is shipping both a "trivalent" vaccine that protects against three strains and is approved for ages 6 months and up, and a "quadrivalent" vaccine that protects against four strains and is approved for ages 18 through 64. The latter comes with a new "microinjection" system with a needle that's 6/100ths of an inch.

- Afluria, CSL Behring's trivalent vaccine, is approved for ages 5 and up and can be given through a needleless injection system called Stratis



that is made by PharmaJet. Stratis pushes vaccine fluid through skin in one-tenth of a second, faster than a needle injection. That may appeal to people who dislike needles, but Hirsch noted that it can still be painful.

Need extra protection?

Sanofi also sells High-Dose Fluzone for people 65 and older. The vaccine stimulates the immune system

to produce more antibodies against the flu, so it's believed to be more effective. Seniors may consider this option since they are more likely to develop life-threatening complications from the flu.

GlaxoSmithKline's Fluarix and FluLaval shots, which are approved for ages 3 and up, all protect against four strains this year for the first time instead of three.

Egg allergies?

Flublok, Protein Sciences

Corp.'s genetically engineered vaccine, is approved for anyone 18 or older. It's designed for people with an egg allergy who can't get traditional vaccines made by incubating influenza virus in eggs for several months. Egg allergy is rare, affecting just 0.2 percent to 4 percent of children, studies show.

Flublok is manufactured inside caterpillar cells, based on the genetic code for a flu virus surface pro-

tein. It contains more active ingredient than traditional shots.

Other options

Novartis AG shipped two trivalent vaccines: Fluvirin for ages 4 and older, and Flucelvax, which is grown rapidly in live cells, for people 18 and older. That new technology also allows much-faster production than incubating influenza viruses in eggs, which would be useful during a pandemic.