

## THE FLU VIRUS IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING

Each year, slightly different strains of the flu virus circulate around the world. These small variations may be enough to reduce the effectiveness of earlier immunity, whether acquired through vaccination or a previous infection. **Getting vaccinated annually is the best way to strengthen your immune system and prepare your body to fight new flu viruses.**

Flu vaccination can be done throughout the entire season, but **the best protection is achieved when vaccinated before the peak illness period (October to December)**. In healthy individuals, the flu vaccine begins to work 10–14 days after administration, and its effect lasts for up to one year. In the absence of medical contraindications, anyone aged six months and older can be vaccinated against the flu. Vaccination is particularly important for children, pregnant women, and those over the age of 60.

## FLU VACCINATION IS FREE OF CHARGE FOR THOSE IN HIGH-RISK GROUPS

It is especially important for **people at higher risk of severe illness or complications** to get vaccinated.

These include:

- Children aged 6 months to 7 years
- Pregnant women
- Adults aged 60 and older
- Children and adolescents with chronic health conditions
- Residents of a social welfare institution

For others, the flu vaccine is available for a fee. In addition to those in high-risk groups, people who live with them are also strongly encouraged to get vaccinated.

**People who have received the flu vaccine generally experience a milder form of the illness and are less likely to develop complications.**

You can get vaccinated against the flu at family medicine centres, many pharmacies, and vaccination offices in medical institutions across Estonia.

## 5 COMMON FLU COMPLICATIONS

Every year, hundreds of patients require intensive care due to severe flu-related complications, most of whom belong to high-risk groups. Flu vaccination helps prevent serious illness and the complications caused by the virus.

### 1. Pneumonia

The most common flu complication, in which the virus causes severe and potentially life-threatening inflammation of the lungs.

### 2. Middle Ear Infection and Sinusitis

A complication often seen in children, where inflammation that begins in the nasopharynx spreads to the ears and sinuses.

### 3. Exacerbation of Chronic Diseases

The flu puts great stress on the body, which can dangerously worsen existing conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease.

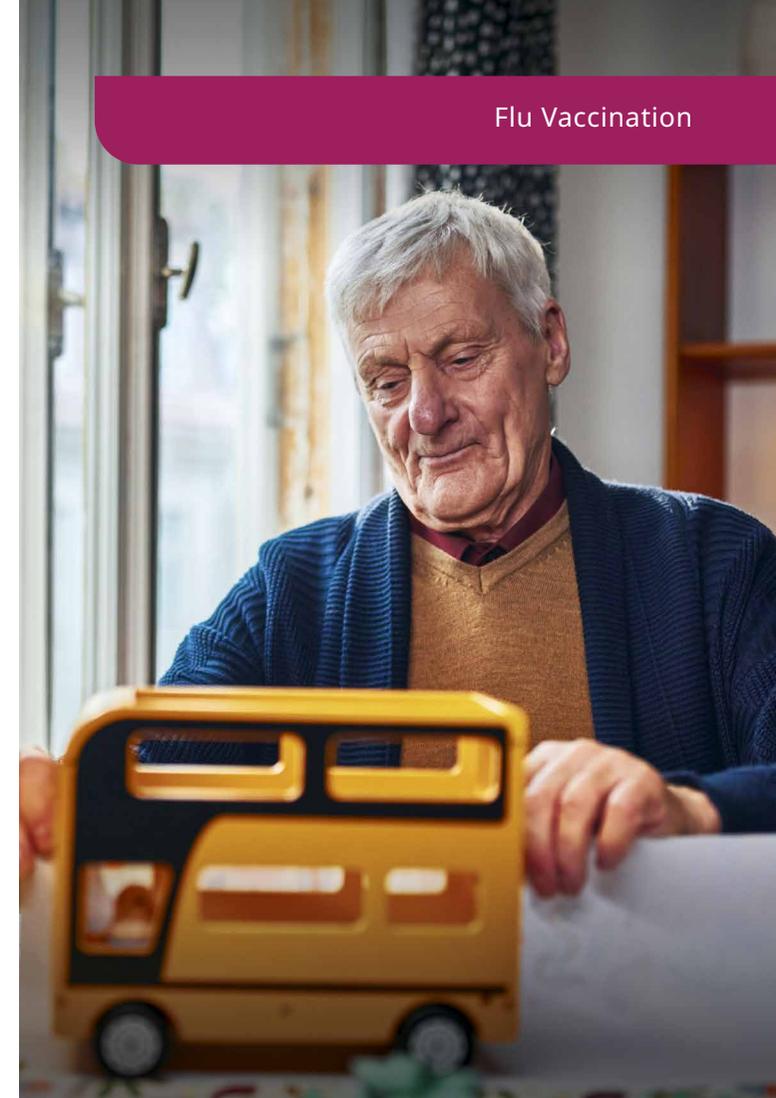
### 4. Encephalitis (Inflammation of the Brain and Meninges)

A rare but very serious complication in which the flu virus attacks brain tissue and may cause permanent damage.

### 5. Myocarditis

A life-threatening condition where the flu virus causes inflammation of the heart muscle, disrupting heart function and potentially leading to arrhythmias or heart attack.

Flu Vaccination



**Flu is a serious respiratory infectious disease - annual vaccination is the best protection!**

If you have any questions, please contact your family medicine center.

Family doctor's helpline **1220**

[vaktsineeri.ee](http://vaktsineeri.ee)  
[terviseportaal.ee](http://terviseportaal.ee)



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## THE FLU VACCINE PROTECTS

Getting a flu shot every year is one of the easiest and most effective ways to protect yourself from illness and to help prevent the spread of the virus. Protect yourself and those around you - get vaccinated before flu season begins.

TERVISEKASSA 



TERVISEAMET

The flu is a serious respiratory illness that spreads quickly and can strike anyone without warning. It often causes high fever, headache, sore throat, fatigue, and can lead to complications requiring hospitalization or, in severe cases, even death.

### The flu usually spreads through droplets in the air.

When an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or laughs, tiny virus particles are released and can travel up to two meters. These particles can also settle on surfaces, where they may remain infectious for some time. The virus can easily transfer from contaminated surfaces to the hands, and from there to the mouth or nose. Once it reaches the respiratory tract, it can cause infection.

### Did you know that the flu virus can survive on surfaces for a long time?

- Hard surfaces (e.g., tables, doorknobs): 24–48 hours
- Porous materials (e.g., clothing, paper): 8–12 hours
- Hands: up to 5 minutes, or up to 3 hours with frequent contact

## TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN ESTONIA GET INFECTED DURING PEAK VIRUS SEASON

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), influenza causes an estimated 40,000 to 220,000 deaths globally each year. During flu season, 5–15% of a country's population typically becomes infected.

### In Estonia:

- Tens of thousands of people catch the flu each year
- Around 1,500 of them require hospitalization
- More than 150 need intensive care
- Over 100 people die annually from flu-related complications

## IS IT THE FLU OR A COMMON COLD?

During the winter season, various milder cold viruses circulate alongside the flu. These can make you feel unwell but usually pass more quickly. So, how can you tell whether it's just a cold or something more serious, like the flu?

### FLU OR A COLD – A COMPARISON OF SYMPTOMS

Signs and Symptoms	Cold virus	Flu
Symptom onset	Gradual	Abrupt
Fever	Rare	Persistent high fever (lasting several days)
Fatigue and weakness	Sometimes	Usual
Chills	Uncommon	Common
Muscle aches	Mild to none	Usual
Headache	Rare	Common
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Coughing	Mild to moderate	Common
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes

Although the symptoms may appear similar at first, **the flu usually takes a much more severe course** and can lead to serious complications, such as:

- Pneumonia and respiratory failure
- Inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis)
- Worsening of chronic conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes)
- Middle ear infections in young children



WHETHER IT'S A COLD OR THE FLU, STAY HOME IF YOU'RE FEELING UNWELL AND AVOID CLOSE CONTACT WITH OTHERS. WAIT UNTIL YOU'VE FULLY RECOVERED BEFORE RETURNING TO PUBLIC SPACES OR GROUP SETTINGS.

## THE FLU VACCINE IS NECESSARY AND FREE FOR ALL PREGNANT WOMEN

The flu vaccine is safe at all stages of pregnancy. After vaccination, the mother's immunity is also passed on to the child, protecting them during the first six months of life. The flu vaccine is recommended for all pregnant women, especially for those whose second and third trimesters fall during the peak flu season (October to May). Vaccination is free for those at risk and is available through family doctors, many pharmacies, and vaccination offices located in major hospitals across Estonia.

Influenza can be severe in pregnant women, cause serious complications, and endanger the fetus. Pregnant women are advised to get vaccinated before the start of the flu season, ideally in the last weeks of September.



## FLU CAN BE VERY DANGEROUS FOR OLDER ADULTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Flu is especially dangerous for older adults and young children. Each year, approximately 1,500 people are hospitalized due to the flu. Half of them are over 60 years old, and one in five are children under seven.

In severe cases, the flu can lead to pneumonia, which may cause difficulty breathing. It can also worsen chronic conditions such as heart disease or diabetes. In such cases, hospitalisation may be required to help stabilise the underlying illness.