

Gearing up for the holidays? Don't let a bout with the flu leave you stuck in bed instead of celebrating with family.

"Holiday gatherings are ideal for spreading flu and other nasty viruses," said Dr. Joann Schaefer, the state's chief medical officer and director of public health for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

"Getting a flu vaccine is an easy and effective way to help keep you healthy and on-the-go during this festive season."

This year the recommendation is everyone six months and older should get vaccinated.

While flu can make anyone sick, certain people are at greater risk for serious complications, and it's extremely important they receive vaccine:

- Older people
- Young children
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic lung disease (like asthma and COPD), diabetes (type 1 and 2), heart disease, neurologic conditions and certain other long-term health conditions

Flu vaccine provides protection that lasts through the entire season. A person isn't likely to get sick from the virus, and staying healthy means one's family won't be infected.

Flu vaccine is safe, effective and rigorously tested. It's updated each season to protect against flu viruses that research shows will cause the most illness. Even if people had the H1N1 flu vaccine last season, they will want to get this year's flu vaccine. H1N1 is included but so are two other flu viruses, H3N2 and influenza B. You'll want to be protected against all three. One shot—triple protection.

Remember, it's a myth that one can get flu from the shot. The most common reaction is soreness and redness at the injection site. FluMist, a nasal spray, is available for healthy people two- to 49 years old who don't like needles.

If interested in flu vaccine, contact a health care provider or local health department. For a list of local health departments go to <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/puh/oph/lhd.htm>.

Here are some additional things to protect from the flu:

- Wash hands often
- Avoid contact with people who are sick
- Stay home from work, family gatherings and social functions if sick
- Cover the mouth and nose when coughing with a tissue or sleeve, not the hands
- Eat healthy and get plenty of rest
- Don't smoke

For information on flu, go to <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/flu>.