

## There's Still Time to Get the Flu Shot

**Holidays, cold weather, and indoor activity are prime factors for getting the flu virus. Pictured, Catherine Luce, RN, left, administers a flu shot to Sejal Naik, a Kaiser Permanente Northern California clinical practice consultant.**

With the approach of the holidays and cold weather, more people are sharing indoor spaces and unfortunately, their germs.

Flu germs, carried in saliva and spread by sneezes and coughs, can live in an airborne cloud and on surfaces like door handles, for “many hours,” depending on the volume, said [Randy Bergen, MD](#), a Kaiser Permanente Walnut Creek pediatrician and the clinical lead for the Kaiser Permanente flu vaccine program in Northern California.

That’s why now is a great time to get a flu shot if you haven’t already, Bergen said. Kaiser Permanente already has administered close to 1.2 million doses of this year’s flu vaccine in Northern California, but “we’d love to get up to 2 million.”

“It’s never really too late to get the vaccine,” Bergen said. “But remember, it takes up to two weeks to start working.”

### Flu in the Air

Interestingly, Bergen said the perfect environment for a cloud of flu or cold virus to stay alive in the air is a temperature of 41 degrees with 30% humidity, but it can still linger for hours at other temperatures and humidity.

“We can literally walk through an aerosolized virus and inhale it or touch a surface where the virus has landed,” Bergen said. “You breathe it in, or you touch a surface, then you touch your eyes, your nose, or your mouth, and you get the flu.”

What’s even more “devilish,” about the whole affair, Bergen said, is that if you get the virus, you will most likely be infecting others before you even realize you are sick.

“There’s a period where you really don’t feel sick, maybe 12 to 24 hours before you start feeling bad, and that’s when you are spreading it,” Bergen said. “Once you start feeling sick, you start taking precautions like washing your hands and covering your cough, but you have already done the damage. That is all the more reason to get vaccinated.”

### Shot Does Not Give You the Flu

Bergen said the number one reason people refuse to get the flu shot, “and this is year after year,”

is that they think the flu vaccine can give you the flu.

“This notion that we are injecting flu into people is wrong,” Bergen said. “It’s simply not possible.”

He explained that while the injectable form of the vaccine carries one of the proteins of the flu virus, “that protein alone can absolutely, positively not give you the flu.”

“It can give you a sore arm,” Bergen said. “But it can’t give you the flu.”

*Flu vaccine clinics at Kaiser Permanente Northern California medical offices and hospitals operate through the end of the flu season. Members can call the Kaiser Permanente Flu Shot Clinic Information Line at 800-KP-FLU-11 to find out when and where they can get the vaccine.*