How to Use MeSH Terms in PubMed

By Anna Do, May 2019

MeSH terms, also known as Medical Subject Headings, can help you create a targeted PubMed search. MeSH is the controlled vocabulary used for indexing PubMed citations. During the indexing processes, the most specific MeSH terms are applied to a journal article. Then, during your PubMed search, MeSH terms recognized in the query are automatically mapped to the most specific terms, and those are included in your search.

1. From the PubMed homepage (visit the library homepage to access the link), in the “More Resources” section, click the link to the MeSH database.
2. Search for your term. The database will redirect you to the search’s MeSH term. For example, the MeSH term for “flu vaccines” is “Influenza Vaccines,” and the MeSH page will display a definition and additional information about the term.

Entry Terms:
- Influenza Vaccine
- Vaccine, Influenza
- Flu Vaccines
- Influenza Virus Vaccines
- Influenza Virus Vaccine
- Vaccine, Influenza Virus
- Virus Vaccine, Influenza
- High-Dose Trivalent Influenza Vaccine
- High Dose Trivalent Influenza Vaccine
- Monovalent Influenza Vaccines
- Influenza Vaccines, Monovalent
- Vaccines, Monovalent Influenza
- Trivalent Influenza Vaccine
- Influenza Vaccine, Trivalent
- Vaccine, Trivalent Influenza
- Intrasinal Live-Attenuated Influenza Vaccine
- Intrasinal Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine
- Universal Flu Vaccines
- Universal Influenza Vaccines
- Trivalent Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine
- LAV Vaccine
- Vaccine, LAV
- Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine
- Influenza Vaccine, Quadrivalent
- Vaccine, Quadrivalent Influenza

3. Terms are arranged hierarchically by subject categories with more specific terms arranged beneath broader terms. For example, “Influenza Vaccines” is listed under “Viral Vaccines,” which is under “Vaccines.”
4. Click the broader term (in this case “Vaccines”) to display the variety of terms available under this concept.

5. To continue on with your search, scroll down and click on your original MeSH term. The page will display subheadings that may be used to narrow the search. For example, under “Influenza Vaccines,” if we are interested in the negative effects of the flu vaccines, we can check the subheadings “adverse effects,” and then click the button “Add to search builder.”
6. If you would like to limit your search further, enter another term in the search box at the top of the page. Repeat steps 2-4.

7. After adding your terms to the search builder, click “Search PubMed.” This search will retrieve a relatively small number of targeted citations that has been indexed with MeSH terms.

Please keep in mind that not all PubMed citations are slated to be MeSH indexed, and it may take several weeks for a new citation to be indexed, so using MeSH terms will limit your results to a subset of PubMed citations. To see all the MeSH terms used to index an article, click on the MeSH terms label. Each MeSH term includes a menu that can be used as a search term in PubMed or MeSH. For a step-by-step tutorial on how to use MeSH terms in PubMed, check out this video on YouTube: https://youtu.be/uyF8uOY9wys

For more help visit https://library.mghihp.edu