

2020-2021 Flu Vaccine Key Points

Updated September 25, 2020

TOPLINE MESSAGING

- *During the 2020-2021 cold and flu season, getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever to protect yourself, your loved ones, your community, and the global community from flu.*
- *Flu vaccination can flatten the curve of flu illnesses, help protect essential workers from flu, and save medical resources for care of patients with COVID-19.*
- *The more people vaccinated against flu, the more people protected from flu.*
- *September and October are good [times to get a flu vaccine](#).*
- *More than [87 million doses of flu vaccine](#) have been distributed so far this season.*
- *To find a flu vaccine in your community, visit www.vaccinefinder.org*

CAMPAIGN UPDATES:

- CDC will kick-off it's national influenza vaccination campaign on October 1, 2020, at the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases [Influenza/Pneumococcal Disease News Conference](#).
- CDC has many educational resources to promote flu vaccination. Digital resources are available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/resource-center/toolkit/index.htm>.
- The agency also is launching a social activation campaign called “#SleeveUp.” More information and digital, customizable, frames for social media are available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/resource-center/sleeveup/index.htm>

SUMMARY KEY POINTS:

- Now more than ever, everyone needs to do their part to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, like flu and COVID-19.
- Flu usually causes millions of illnesses, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and tens of thousands of deaths in the United States each year.

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- What will happen this fall and winter is uncertain, but CDC is preparing for COVID-19 and seasonal flu to spread at the same time.
- Getting a flu vaccine will be more important than ever for protecting your own health, especially if you are at high risk of developing serious flu complications. It also will help to protect the people around you.
- Getting a flu vaccine is something easy that everyone can do to reduce the impact of flu this season.
- A flu vaccine reduces flu illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.
- It protects the person getting vaccinated and the people around them.
- A flu vaccine is an important tool to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community against flu.
- The more people who are vaccinated, the more people are protected from flu.
- This **fall and winter**, getting a flu vaccine will be more important than ever since hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices are likely to be busy caring for COVID-19 patients.
- Getting a flu vaccine will:
 - help keep you and your loved ones out of the medical setting, and
 - help save medical resources to care for COVID-19 patients.
 - A flu vaccine also helps protect the frontline health care workers who will be caring for people sick with respiratory illnesses this fall and winter.
- Getting a flu vaccine also can help protect essential workers who need to be out to do their jobs, keeping critical services going in communities across the country.
- Manufacturers project they will provide between 194 and 198 million doses of flu vaccine this flu season.
- Ongoing COVID-19 activity may affect when, where, and how flu vaccines are given.
- Visit www.vaccinefinder.org to find a place nearby to get your flu vaccine.

CDC FLU VACCINE ACTIVITIES

- CDC works each year to increase the number of people who receive a flu vaccine and eliminate barriers to vaccination.
- CDC is working with manufacturers to maximize flu vaccine availability.

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- As part of efforts to maximize flu vaccination by increasing availability of vaccine, CDC is purchasing an additional 2 million doses of pediatric and 9.3 million doses of adult influenza vaccine.
 - CDC is working with providers to develop contingency plans on how to vaccinate people against flu without increasing their risk of exposure to other respiratory illnesses.
- CDC has released [Interim Guidance for Immunization Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- This guidance is intended to help immunization providers in a variety of clinical and alternative settings with the safe administration of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This guidance will be continually reassessed and updated based on the evolving epidemiology of COVID-19 in the United States.
- Healthcare providers who give vaccines should also consult guidance from state, local, tribal, and territorial health officials.
- For the complete interim guidance for immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html>.
 - People may need to get their flu vaccine somewhere different than usual if there is ongoing COVID-19 activity.

Before and during 2020-2021, CDC will increase efforts to promote flu vaccination with special communication outreach, including to groups of people for whom vaccination is especially important, like older adults and people with underlying health conditions.

- Communication strategies for providers and the public will include:
 - Educational outreach activities by CDC, including social media, press conferences, web page spotlights, radio media tours, op-eds, and other publications,
 - A digital campaign to educate the general public and people with who are at increased risk from influenza and COVID-19 complications,
 - Special educational efforts to inform the general population, people with underlying health conditions, and African American and Hispanic audiences about the importance of flu vaccination, and

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- Updated vaccination websites for the public and providers that highlight the safety precautions being implemented in healthcare facilities during the pandemic.

SUPPORTING TECHNICAL KEY POINTS:

- The world is experiencing a pandemic caused by a new coronavirus.
- While it's unclear how long the pandemic will last, COVID-19 activity will likely continue for some time.
 - We may see COVID-19 activity vary over time based on many different factors.
 - Activity may vary from one place to another.
- During some flu pandemics, the first wave of disease activity has been followed by a subsequent wave of disease in the fall causing more illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths than the first wave.
- It is also unclear what impact the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will have on the upcoming influenza season.
 - It's possible there will be less influenza activity than usual. Social distancing and other measures to reduce COVID-19 may also reduce flu activity this fall.
 - It's also possible that influenza viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will be spreading at the same time.
 - It is also possible that people may get flu and COVID-19 at the same time if both viruses are circulating.
- If there is COVID-19 and flu activity at the same time, this could place a tremendous burden on the health care system and result in many illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.
- In the context of likely ongoing COVID-19 activity, getting a flu vaccine is more important now than ever.
- Getting a flu vaccine will not prevent COVID-19, but it has many important benefits.
- Flu vaccines have been safely given to millions of Americans for more than 50 years.
- Flu vaccine benefits include:
 - Every year, flu vaccine prevents millions of illnesses, tens of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths.

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- Flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization and death by about half.
- If you get a flu vaccine, you are less likely to get flu and to need to go to a doctor's office, urgent care or emergency room. You are also less likely to be hospitalized or to die from flu.
 - A 2018 study showed that from 2012 to 2015, flu vaccination among adults reduced the risk of being admitted to an intensive care unit (ICU) with flu by 82 percent.
- **Flu vaccination helps [protect women during and after pregnancy](#).**
 - **A number of studies have shown that in addition to helping to protect pregnant women, a flu vaccine given during pregnancy helps protect the baby from flu for several months after birth, when he or she is not old enough to be vaccinated.**
- Flu vaccination also is an important preventive tool for people with chronic health conditions.
 - Flu vaccination has been associated with lower rates of some cardiac events among people with heart disease, especially among those who had had a cardiac event in the past year.
 - Flu vaccination can reduce worsening of and hospitalization for flu-related chronic lung disease, such as in people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
 - Flu vaccination also has been shown in separate studies to be associated with reduced hospitalizations among people with diabetes and chronic lung disease.
- While some people who get a flu vaccine may still get sick with the flu, some studies show their illness is less severe.
 - More information about flu vaccine benefits and safety is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm> and <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccinesafety.htm> .
- Getting a flu vaccine can protect you from needing medical attention and possibly being exposed to something contagious, like the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Getting vaccinated yourself may also protect people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like

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babies and young children, older people, and people with certain chronic health conditions.

- Flu vaccines reduce the burden of flu on our communities and also reduce the burden of flu on the health care system.
 - This can save medical resources to use to care for people with COVID-19, a disease for which there is no vaccine at this time.
 - This fall, another important reason to get a flu vaccine is to do your part to help save medical resources to fight COVID-19.
 - A flu vaccine is an easy way to help 'flatten the curve' of respiratory illnesses caused by flu this fall and winter.

VACCINE SUPPLY, COVERAGE & VACCINATION

- Last season, more than 174 million doses of flu vaccine were distributed.
- Manufacturers have projected that more flu vaccine will be available this season, between 194 million and 198 million doses of flu vaccine.
- Most of this vaccine will be quadrivalent vaccine (99%) and thimerosal-free or reduced vaccine (87%). About 20% of flu vaccines will be egg-free.
- Manufacturers have already begun distributing flu vaccine and will continue throughout the season. (No reported delays at this time.)
- Because of the record number of doses being manufactured this year, the time to produce and distribute them will be longer. CDC has begun providing weekly updates on [flu vaccine distribution](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-supply-distribution.htm). (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-supply-distribution.htm>)
- Only about half of the U.S. population gets a flu vaccine each year.
- While numbers vary from season to season depending on different factors, including how well the vaccine is working and how many people have gotten vaccinated, flu vaccination prevents millions of flu illnesses and medical visits, tens of thousands of flu hospitalizations and thousands of deaths from flu each season.
- As an example, during the 2018-2019 flu season, vaccination prevented an estimated 4.4 million flu illnesses, 58,000 flu hospitalizations, and 3,500 flu deaths.

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- Additional flu vaccinations could prevent more flu illnesses and hospitalizations.
 - In 2019, CDC published an analysis estimating how many more illnesses and hospitalizations could be prevented with more vaccination.
 - In that analysis, vaccinating an additional 5% of older people, representing 2.5 million more flu vaccine doses given to those aged ≥ 65 years, could prevent a total of 776,000 illnesses and 75,000 hospitalizations during a high-severity flu season.
 - Increasing flu vaccination by 5% in working-age adults, who tend to have the lowest flu vaccination coverage, could prevent a total of 14.6 million illnesses and 82,000 hospitalizations during a high-severity flu season. This 5% increase in coverage represents an additional 6.8 million flu vaccine doses provided to working-age adults.
- The effects of increased flu vaccination vary season to season. During many seasons, higher coverage with seasonal influenza vaccine would result in decreases in doctor and emergency department visits and hospitalizations and deaths. That would save doctors' and nurses' time and critical supplies like facemasks, hospital beds and ventilators to use for the care of people with COVID- 19.
- Flu usually causes a lot of illness in the fall and winter. Getting a flu vaccine will help prevent flu; this is an easy way to help “flatten the curve” of respiratory illnesses overall this fall and winter.
- Other actions that are always recommended are everyday preventive actions like staying home when sick, covering coughs and sneezes, and frequent handwashing.
 - Depending on local circumstances during the upcoming season, other actions may be recommended to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including possibly wearing a cloth face covering in public settings and staying home as much as possible.

WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED:

- CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older with rare exceptions

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- get a flu vaccine this and every season.
- The more people who get vaccinated, the more people are protected from flu.
 - Getting a flu vaccine is one part of a comprehensive strategy to protect those who are most vulnerable to getting flu, and to save medical resources.
 - While flu vaccination is always important, this season getting vaccinated is even more important for certain people who are at higher risk of being exposed to, or developing serious flu **and** COVID-19 complications, or who are caregivers of people who are at higher risk from these two diseases.
 - This includes:
 - People 65 and older, who account for the majority of hospitalizations and deaths from flu and COVID-19.
 - People with underlying medical conditions like lung disease, heart disease, neurologic disorders, weakened immune systems, and diabetes, who also are more likely to have serious flu and COVID-19 outcomes.
 - African Americans and Hispanics, who are disproportionately affected by diseases like asthma, diabetes, obesity, and other chronic conditions that can increase the risk for serious flu and COVID-19.
 - Caregivers in LTC facilities—in addition to residents—who are in daily close contact with people who are most vulnerable to serious flu and COVID-19 illness and death.
 - Essential workers who have frequent interactions with the public and who are therefore more likely to be exposed to flu and COVID-19.

WHEN TO GET VACCINATED

- People should get a flu vaccine before flu activity begins in their community.
 - September and October are good times to be vaccinated.
 - Consider taking advantage of any potential lull in COVID-19 activity during September and October to get

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vaccinated.

- Although vaccination by the end of October is recommended, people who have not gotten vaccinated by the end of October should still get vaccinated as soon as possible. Vaccine given in December or later, even if influenza activity has already begun, is still beneficial during most flu seasons.

SUPPLEMENTAL KEY POINTS FOR OLDER ADULTS

- It's estimated that between about 70 percent and 85 percent of seasonal flu-related deaths have occurred in older adults.
- Flu vaccination may not eliminate your risk of getting sick with flu entirely, but it may offer partial protection, decreasing risk of serious outcomes like hospitalization, ICU admission and even death.
- Most flu vaccines protect against 4 different viruses; it's like getting four shots in one.
- There are enhanced influenza vaccines that may provide a better immune response.

SUPPLEMENTAL KEY POINTS FOR PARENTS

- Around 80 percent of flu deaths in children reported to CDC have happened in children who had not been vaccinated against flu.
- Flu vaccines have been shown to be life-saving in children.
- Children are the people most likely to get sick from flu. You can reduce their risk of getting sick with a flu vaccine.
- A 2014 study showed that flu vaccine reduced children's risk of flu-related pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) admission by 74% during flu seasons from 2010-2012.

SUPPLEMENTAL KEY POINTS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

- This fall and winter, getting a flu vaccine is especially important for essential workers.
- Essential workers include those who work in sectors that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has deemed [essential critical infrastructure workers](#). These include the following sectors: Communications, Chemical, Critical Manufacturing, Commercial

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Facilities, Dams, Defense Industrial Base, Emergency Services, Energy, Financial, Food and Agriculture, Government Facilities, Nuclear Reactors, Materials and Waste, Water, Information Technology, Transportation Systems, and Healthcare and Public Health.

- As an essential worker, your work is vital to keeping communities going, but you also may be at a higher risk of being exposed to respiratory viruses, such as the ones that cause flu and COVID-19 because your job may require that you have frequent interactions with people.
- Flu causes a lot of illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths each year.
- Getting an annual flu vaccine has many benefits.
 - Getting a flu vaccine can decrease your risk of getting sick, being hospitalized or dying from flu this season.
 - This can help keep you out of the medical setting, which may be busy caring for COVID-19 patients this flu season.
 - It also can help save scarce medical resources heavily utilized to care for COVID-19 patients.
 - Flu vaccine also can help make sure that you are able to continue your essential work, supporting critical services.
 - Getting a flu vaccine also can help protect the health of people around you. This is especially important if your work involves interacting with people who may be medically fragile (for example, if you work in a long-term care facility or hospital setting).

SUPPLEMENTAL KEY POINTS FOR PEOPLE WITH HEART DISEASE

- Getting an annual flu vaccine is always important for people with heart disease. However, because flu and COVID-19 might spread at the same time this fall and winter, getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever.
- Heart disease includes, but is not limited to, the following conditions: coronary artery disease, heart failure, hypertensive heart disease, pulmonary heart disease, heart valve disorders, arrhythmias including atrial fibrillation, and congenital heart defects.
- Heart disease can make it more likely that you will have serious complications from flu.
- Among adults hospitalized with flu, heart disease is one of the most commonly occurring chronic conditions.

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- Studies have shown that flu is associated with an increased risk of heart attacks and stroke.
- A 2018 study found that the [risk of heart attack was 6 times higher](#) within a week of confirmed flu infection. These findings were most pronounced for older adults and those experiencing their first heart attack.
- A 2020 study found that one in every eight patients who were hospitalized with flu had an acute cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack.
 - A flu vaccine will help reduce your risk of flu-related cardiac complications like a second heart attack, heart failure or ischemic heart disease which occurs when a part of the heart does not receive enough blood.
 - Flu vaccination has been associated with [lower rates of some cardiac events](#) among people with heart disease, especially among those who had a cardiac event in the past year.
 - While some people who get a flu vaccine still get sick with the flu, some studies show their illness will be less severe.
 - Getting vaccinated for flu can help keep you out of the medical setting where you could be exposed to COVID-19.
 - But remember:
 - It's important not to defer regular care.
 - You may be able to have routine visits via telemedicine.
 - If you are experiencing signs or symptoms of a heart attack or stroke, call 9-1-1 right away.
 - It also can help save scarce medical resources to care for COVID-19 patients.
- Flu shots are approved for use in people with heart disease and [other health conditions](#).
- [People with heart disease should generally not receive the nasal spray flu vaccine, also called the live attenuated influenza vaccine \(LAIV\).](#)
- An inactivated or recombinant influenza vaccine can be used (but one should be selected that is appropriate for the age of the person getting vaccinated).

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- Like everyone else, people with heart disease or who have had a stroke should take [everyday preventive actions](#), including avoiding people who are sick and washing hands often.