2020-2021 Flu Vaccine & COVID-19

Key Points
July 15, 2020

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 is part of a comprehensive public health strategy to reduce the burden of flu, but also to preserve scarce health care resources for care of patients with COVID-19.

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.
- What will happen this fall and winter is uncertain, but it is likely that there will be COVID-19 and seasonal flu activity. Getting a flu vaccine will be more important than ever for protecting your own health. It will also help to protect the health of people around you.
- Each year flu causes millions of illnesses, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and tens of thousands of deaths in the United States.
- 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.
- 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 conserve scarce medical resources to care for COVID-19 patients.
- A flu vaccine also helps protect the frontline health care workers who will likely be caring for a lot of people sick with respiratory illnesses this fall and winter.
- Manufacturers project they will provide more than 188 million doses of flu vaccine this flu season.
- Ongoing COVID-19 activity may affect when, where, and how flu vaccines are given.
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- CDC is working with manufacturers to maximize flu vaccine availability and with providers to make sure people can get vaccinated in a safe setting, free from risk of exposure to COVID-19 or other diseases.
- Visit vaccinefinder.gov to find a place nearby to get your flu vaccine.
- CDC works each year to increase the number of people who receive the flu vaccine and eliminate barriers to vaccination.
- Before and during the 2020-2021 flu season, 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 (see list below).

**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.
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- 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:
  - 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 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.
  - 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.
- Flu vaccines reduce the burden of flu on our communities and also reduce the burden of flu on the health care system.
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- This can conserve scarce 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 conserve scarce medical resources to fight COVID-19.

VACCINE SUPPLY, COVERAGE & VACCINATION

- Last season, more than 174 million doses of flu vaccine were distributed.
- Manufacturers have projected that more flu vaccine may be available this season, up to 188 million doses.
- 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.
- People may need to get their flu vaccine somewhere different than usual if there is ongoing COVID-19 activity.
- Less than 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.
- 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 varies 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 free medical resources to care for 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 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 conserve scarce health care 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.
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- 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.
  - July and August are probably too early to get vaccinated, especially for older people.
  - 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 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. Vaccine given in December or later, even if influenza activity has already begun, is still beneficial during most flu seasons.