

Influenza Planning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and influenza viruses are expected to circulate at the same time during the upcoming 2020–2021 influenza season. Therefore, influenza vaccination will be more important than ever to decrease the overall impact of respiratory illnesses by reducing influenza-associated illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths, and reducing the burden on the health care system. Immunization programs and partner organizations will play an essential role in educating and vaccinating people at increased risk for influenza and serious complications.

While influenza vaccination coverage in the U.S. has increased in the last decade, less than 50% of the adult population reported receiving a flu vaccine during the 2018–2019 influenza season. Yet the burden of influenza remains high. Preliminary burden estimates for last season (October 1, 2019, through April 4, 2020) show between:

- 39 million–56 million flu illnesses
- 18 million–26 million flu medical visits
- 410,000–740,000 flu hospitalizations
- 24,000–62,000 flu deaths

Data also show those at higher risk for influenza infection or serious complications, including patients and health care personnel in long-term or nursing care, adults 65 years and older, and adults of any age with certain underlying health conditions, are not being adequately vaccinated. In addition, black and Hispanic adults have lower levels of influenza vaccination. Most recent data from the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 influenza seasons showed vaccination coverage of:

- Less than 40% among non-Hispanic black (NHB) and Hispanic adults
- Approximately 50% among adults age 18–64 years with diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease, or cancer
- Approximately 70% among adults 65 years and older overall (60% NHBs and 69% Hispanics)
- Approximately 70% among adults living in, and health care personnel working in, long-term care facilities
- Approximately 80% among health care personnel overall

Most of these same people are at increased risk from complications related to COVID-19 infection, especially blacks, Hispanics and American Indians and Alaska Natives, who are disproportionately affected by hospitalization and death related to COVID-19.

To address the importance of influenza vaccination, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, CDC will maximize flu vaccination by increasing availability of vaccine, including purchasing an additional 2 million doses of pediatric and 7 million doses of adult flu vaccine, by emphasizing the importance of flu vaccination for the entire flu season which extends into the end of March (particularly since flu vaccination typically drops off by late November), and by conducting targeted communication outreach to specific groups who are at higher risk for complications from flu. These same groups are

often at higher risk for COVID-19 too, so protecting them from influenza is important to decrease their risk of coinfection. 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
- A marketing campaign that will focus on the general population and people with underlying health conditions
- An Ad Council campaign supported by CDC and the American Medical Association reaching out to African American and Hispanic audiences
- Updated vaccination websites for the public and providers that highlight the safety precautions being implemented in healthcare facilities during the pandemic

The success of this year's efforts to combat influenza depends on us working together.

Your organization can help support influenza vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic by sharing key messages extending into December and later:

- Getting a flu vaccine is always the most important thing you can do to help protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community from flu, including reducing the risk of serious outcomes that can lead to hospitalization and death.
- This season, getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever as it will not only protect against flu, but it will also help preserve scarce medical resources for health care providers and COVID-19 patients.
- Getting a flu vaccine is an easy and safe way to do your part to “Fight Flu,” whether it is to protect yourself, your loved ones, your community, or the global community.

It is also critical that safe vaccination practices detailed in CDC [guidance](#) are promoted and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We will continue to share updates and materials as they become available. Continue to visit <http://www.cdc.gov> for influenza updates and <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus> for COVID-19 information.

Additional Resources

- **Interim Guidance for Immunization Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic:**
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html>
- [Frequently Asked Influenza \(Flu\) Questions: 2020–2021 Season](#)
- [CDC Flu Vaccine Finder](#)
- [Recommended Adult Immunization Schedule for ages 19 years or older, United States, 2020](#)
- [Immunization Action Coalition Handouts for Patients and Staff](#)

References

- 2019–2020 U.S. Flu Season: Preliminary Burden Estimates:
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/preliminary-in-season-estimates.htm>
- Flu Vaccination Coverage, United States, 2018–19 Influenza Season:
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/cov-1819estimates.htm>
- Influenza Vaccination Coverage Among Health Care Personnel—United States, 2018–19 Influenza Season: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/hcp-cov-1819estimates.htm>
- Influenza vaccination coverage among adults ≥18 years living in nursing homes by State, HHS Region, and the United States, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Minimum Data Set (MDS), 2017–18 influenza season:
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/nursinghome/report1718/reportii/index.html>
- Interim Guidance for Immunization Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic:
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html>