

Frequently asked influenza (flu) questions: 2020-21 season

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Flu vaccine

What viruses will the 2020-21 flu vaccines protect against?

There are many different flu viruses and they are constantly changing. The composition of U.S. flu vaccines is reviewed annually and updated as needed to match circulating flu viruses. Flu vaccines protect against the three or four viruses (depending on the vaccine) that research suggests will be most common.

Do we need to get a flu vaccine earlier this year (i.e. July/August)?

The CDC does not anticipate a major change in the recommendation on timing of vaccination. Getting vaccinated in July or August is too early, especially for older people, because of the likelihood of reduced protection against flu infection later in the flu season. September and October are good times to get vaccinated. However, as long as flu viruses are circulating, vaccination should continue, even in January or later.

Flu and COVID-19

What is the difference between Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19?

Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2) and flu is caused by infection with influenza viruses. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis. Flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, but there are some key differences between the two.

While more is learned every day, there is still a lot that is unknown about COVID-19 and the virus that causes it.

Will there be flu along with COVID-19 in the fall and winter?

While it's not possible to say with certainty what will happen in the fall and winter, CDC believes it's likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be spreading. In this context, getting a flu vaccine will be more important than ever. CDC recommends that all people 6 months and older get a yearly flu vaccine.

Can I have the flu and COVID-19 at the same time?

Yes. It is possible to have the flu (as well as other respiratory illnesses) and COVID-19 at the same time. Experts are still studying how common this can be.



Will a flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, however flu vaccination has many other important benefits. Flu vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization and death. Getting a flu vaccine this fall will be more important than ever, not only to reduce your risk from flu but also to help conserve potentially scarce health care resources.

Is COVID-19 more dangerous than flu?

Flu and COVID-19 can both result in serious illness, including illness resulting in hospitalization or death. While there is still much to learn about COVID-19, at this time, it does seem as if COVID-19 is more deadly than seasonal influenza; however, it is too early to draw any conclusions from the current data. This may change as we learn more about the number of people who are infected who have mild illnesses.

Flu activity

Will new flu viruses circulate this season?

Flu viruses are constantly changing so it's not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year.

When will flu activity begin and when will it peak?

The timing of flu is difficult to predict and can vary in different parts of the country and from season to season.

If COVID-19 is spreading in my community, should I go out and get a vaccine?

Yes. Getting a flu vaccine is an essential part of protecting your health and your family's health this season. To protect yourself when getting a flu shot continue to take everyday preventive actions such as wearing a mask and frequently practicing hand hygiene.

Administering flu vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic

Why is it important for influenza (flu) vaccines to be given during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19, such as stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders, have led to decreased use of routine preventive medical services, including immunization services. Ensuring that people continue or start getting routine vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for protecting people and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks, including flu. Routine vaccination prevents illnesses that lead to unnecessary medical visits and hospitalizations, which further strain the health care system.

For the upcoming flu season, flu vaccination will be very important to reduce flu because it can help reduce the overall impact of respiratory illnesses on the population and thus lessen the resulting burden on the health care system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A flu vaccine may also provide several individual health benefits, including keeping you from getting sick with the flu, reducing the severity of your illness if you do get the flu and reducing your risk of a flu-associated hospitalization.



Who should get their flu vaccine during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Annual flu vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older, with rare exceptions, because it is an effective way to decrease flu illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing the overall burden of respiratory illnesses is important to protect vulnerable populations at risk for severe illness, the health care system, and other critical infrastructure. Thus, health care providers should use every opportunity during the influenza vaccination season to administer influenza vaccines to all eligible persons, including:

- Essential workers: Including health care personnel (including nursing home, long-term care facility, and pharmacy staff) and other critical infrastructure workforce
- Persons at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19: Including adults aged 65 years and older, residents in a nursing home or long-term care facility, and persons of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions. Severe illness from COVID-19 has been observed to disproportionately affect members of certain racial/ethnic minority groups
- Persons at increased risk for serious influenza complications: Including infants and young children, children with neurologic conditions, pregnant women, adults aged 65 years and older, and other persons with certain underlying medical conditions

Should a flu vaccine be given to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19?

No. Vaccination should be deferred (postponed) for people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of whether they have symptoms, until they have met the criteria to discontinue their isolation. While mild illness is not a contraindication to flu vaccination, vaccination visits for these people should be postponed to avoid exposing health care personnel and other patients to the virus that causes COVID-19. When scheduling or confirming appointments for vaccination, patients should be instructed to notify the provider's office or clinic in advance if they currently have or develop any symptoms of COVID-19.

Additionally, a prior infection with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or flu does not protect someone from future flu infections. The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated every year.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention