2021-2022 Flu Season

Updated: Aug. 12, 2021

Talking Points

The CDC is preparing for the 2021-2022 flu season with the potential for increased activity compared to prior years

- Reduced population immunity due to extremely low flu virus activity since March 2020 could result in an early and possibly severe flu season
- This risk may be heightened by the co-circulation of flu, SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19), and other respiratory viruses like Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), which could place a high burden on the health care system
- The National Respiratory and Enteric Virus Surveillance System (NREVSS) found some common respiratory viruses, including RSV which also had low levels of circulation during the 2020-2021 season, is increasing outside of its typical season. RSV is a cold virus that can affect anyone, mainly children. Normally, RSV season peaks in the fall and winter, however all summer long there have been increased cases of RSV in children and these cases are continuing.
- Flu vaccination remains the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones against flu and its potentially serious complications.
- COVID-19 vaccination is the best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 disease and its potentially serious complications. Persons 12 years and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination in the U.S.

Flu activity during the 2020-2021 season was unusually low globally, despite high levels of testing and relatively high flu vaccination rates

- The low level of flu activity during the 2020-2021 season is likely attributed to COVID-19 mitigation measures like mask wearing, staying home, washing hands, school closures, reduced travel, increased ventilation of indoor spaces and physical distancing
- A record number of Influenza vaccinations last season likely also contributed to reduced flu illness
- Preliminary estimates indicate that 50-55% of adults got a flu vaccine compared with a 2019-2020 estimate of 48% by the end of May 2020

Several factors could heighten the severity of the flu season this year

- Antibodies that protect against flu wane over time. Antibodies we developed from getting a flu vaccine in the 2020-21 season would have waned by the time the 2021-22 flu season begins. That is why you need a flu vaccine every year.
- Immunity from flu vaccination wanes more quickly than immunity from natural infection
- Due to last season's reduced flu activity, adult immunity (especially among those who were not vaccinated), will now depend on exposure to viruses prior to the 2020-21 season
- Young children, either previously unvaccinated or without prior exposure to the flu, will also have lower flu virus immunity

People with certain medical conditions are at higher risk of complications from the flu

- In prior years, nine out of 10 adults hospitalized with the flu had at least one reported underlying medical condition
- Diabetes, asthma, chronic lung disease and chronic heart disease are among the most common long-term medical conditions that complicate a flu infection
- CDC recommends that people at higher risk of developing serious flu complications be treated with flu antiviral drugs if they get sick with the flu
- People 65 years and older are at higher risk of getting seriously ill from the flu

A CDC analysis of flu hospitalization rates by race and ethnicity (adjusted for age) during 10 flu seasons from 2009-2010 through 2018-2019 found higher hospitalization risk for

- Non-Hispanic Black persons (68 per 100,000)
- Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native persons (48 per 100,000)
- Hispanic or Latino persons (44 per 100,000)

Pregnant people are at high risk of complications from the flu

- Influenza can be dangerous for pregnant people and may be harmful for the developing baby
- Flu shots have been given to millions of pregnant people over many years with a good safety record
- Getting a flu shot can help protect pregnant people and their babies from flu for several months after birth when the baby is too young to get vaccinated

The burden of flu in the U.S. can vary widely and is determined by several factors

- The characteristics and timing of circulating influenza viruses
- How many people have pre-existing immunity to circulating influenza viruses
- How well the flu vaccine is protecting those who are vaccinated against illness
- How many people get vaccinated during a flu season

Getting an annual flu vaccine this fall is important to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community against flu

- Flu vaccination reduces the burden of flu illness, hospitalization and death

- During 2019–2020, nearly 200 U.S. flu deaths in children were reported to CDC; about 80 percent of those children were not vaccinated against the flu
- People of any age with chronic conditions like breathing or lung problems, heart disease or weakened immune systems are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications

COVID-19 vaccines may be given at the same time as other vaccines, including the flu vaccine

- Previously, CDC recommended spacing COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines by 14 days
- Current CDC guidance is that COVID-19 vaccines may be given at the same time as other vaccines
- Health care providers (HCP) are recommended to counsel patients that there is a risk of more local reactions on the arm for people who get both vaccines on the same day, (example: arm redness, soreness). These reactions are mild and go away quickly

Flu vaccines that will be available this season

- All flu vaccines for the 2021-22 season will be quadrivalent (protect against 4 strains: 2 A strains and 2 B strains) and can be given to persons 6 months and older
- Both egg-based and NON-egg-based brands will be available in the injectable (shot) form
- The live attenuated (nasal spray) vaccine will still be available for healthy persons ages 2 through 49 years of age

There are slightly different considerations for beginning flu vaccinations this season, depending on age

- FOR ADULTS, vaccination is recommended to be offered **by the end of October**, and to continue as long as influenza viruses are circulating locally
- July and August are probably too early, particularly for older adults because of concerns for waning immunity
- FOR CHILDREN, particularly those 6 months through 8 years who may need two doses of flu vaccine, vaccination should occur as soon as vaccine is available

Flu vaccination remains the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones against flu and its potentially serious complications

- Flu vaccination is an important preventive tool for people with chronic health conditions
- Flu vaccination helps protect women from flu during and after their pregnancy
- A number of studies have shown a flu vaccine given during pregnancy helps protect the baby from flu for several months after birth
- Flu vaccination has been shown in several studies to reduce severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick

- Flu illness is more dangerous than the common cold for children
- Children commonly need medical care because of flu, especially children younger than 5 years old
- Children of any age with certain chronic health conditions also are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications
- Getting a flu vaccine is the best way to protect your child from flu.
- Some children between 6 months through 8 years of age, require two doses of flu vaccine this season spaced at least 4 weeks apart. Consult a health care provider to determine whether two doses are recommended for your child.

Social Media Posts
Talking points, like those above, are meant for just that — talking. They shouldn't be used verbatim in print, email or social media.

Talking points are most effective when you use your own language to share the basic information found in said content, sharing messages in a style of speech that is both expected and best understood by your audiences. For social media, that means keeping it short, conversational and not trying to tackle too much information at once. Stick to the most important details, and don't try to explain too much in a single post.

You wouldn't read Shakespeare to a fifth-grade class; instead, you would talk about the general themes of Shakespeare's stories and avoid the complicated language. We suggest a similar approach to using critical vaccine information on social media. For example:

Twitter (limited to 280 characters with spaces):

Getting a #fluvaccine this fall is very important to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community against flu.

While there are many unknowns with the upcoming #fluseason, relaxed COVID-19 measures will likely result in the return of the seasonal flu

Not wearing a mask, not social distancing, may result in the return of the seasonal flu

Flu vaccination is especially important for people who are more likely to develop serious complications from the #flu, such as people with chronic conditions, racial and ethnic minorities, those 65 years and older, young children and pregnant people.

Getting a #fluvaccine can reduce flu illness, hospitalization and death. For more information on flu vaccine benefits, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm

Facebook

Flu vaccination is especially important for people who are more likely to develop serious complications from the #flu, such as people with chronic conditions, racial and ethnic minorities, those 65 years and older, children and pregnant people. Find more information here: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/index.htm

Getting a flu vaccine this fall is very important to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community against flu. While there are many unknowns with the upcoming flu season, relaxed COVID-19 measures (like not wearing a mask, not social distancing) will likely result in the return of the seasonal flu. Find more information here: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/index.htm

No vaccine offers 100% protection, however getting a flu vaccine can reduce your chances of getting seriously ill from the flu, from being hospitalized or dying from the flu. For more information on flu vaccine benefits, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm

Additional Resources

- CDC Benefits of Flu Vaccination: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm
- CDC Digital Media Toolkit for Flu: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/resource-center/toolkit/index.htm
- Stay tuned for 2021-22 flu season materials
- Flu Disparities Among Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups and Early-Season Influenza Vaccination Uptake and Intent Among Adults – United States, September 2020