

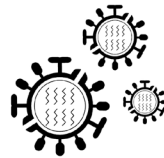
Communicating the Benefits of Seasonal Influenza Vaccine during COVID-19

Influenza (flu) severity varies from year to year, but flu always brings serious consequences.ⁱ The prevention of influenza and its associated consequences is important every year. Although the effectiveness of the flu vaccine can vary, overall the vaccine markedly lowers the risk of influenza-related illness, hospitalization, and death.ⁱⁱ

The COVID-19 pandemic means preventing influenza during 2020–21 is more important than ever. Influenza and COVID-19 share many symptoms. Preventing influenza means fewer people will need to seek medical care and testing for possible COVID-19 or influenza. And increasing flu vaccination uptake saves healthcare resources for COVID-19 and other conditions. Begin recommending flu vaccine now, and vaccinate throughout the flu season, providing extra outreach to those at highest risk of severe COVID-19 or severe influenza.

CDC estimates that, from October 1, 2019–April 4, 2020, there were:

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**



SOURCE: CDC, 2020

What are the Benefits of Seasonal Flu Vaccine?

Research shows flu vaccination:

Reduces Hospitalization and Death

- ✓ Pediatric deaths from flu were cut in half for children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and by two-thirds for healthy childrenⁱⁱⁱ
- ✓ Influenza hospitalizations were cut in half for all adults (including those 65+ years of age)^{iv}
- ✓ Influenza hospitalizations dropped dramatically among people with chronic health conditions – by 79% for people with diabetes^v and 52% for those with chronic lung disease^{vi}
- ✓ Vaccinating long-term care facility (LTCF) staff reduces hospitalizations and deaths in LTCF residents^{vii}

Reduces Severity of Illness in Hospitalized Individuals

- ✓ Among adults hospitalized with flu, intensive care unit (ICU) admissions decreased by more than half (59%), and fewer days were spent in ICU if vaccinated^{viii}
- ✓ Children’s risk of admission to a pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) for flu-related illness was cut by almost 75%^{ix}

Reduces Risks for Major Cardiac Events

- ✓ Risk of a major cardiac event (e.g., heart attack) among adults with existing cardiovascular disease was reduced by more than one-third^x

Protects Pregnant Women and Their Babies

- ✓ For pregnant women, flu-associated acute respiratory infections were cut in half^{xi}, and flu-associated hospitalizations were reduced by 40%^{xii}
- ✓ Influenza illnesses and influenza-related hospitalizations in infants under 6 months of age fell by half when their mothers were vaccinated^{xiii,xiv}



Vaccination rates* remain well below optimal levels:

- 63%** children 6 months–17 years
- 45%** adults 18+ years
- 68%** adults 65+ years
- 81%** healthcare personnel
- 54%** pregnant women



*Estimates from the 2018–19 influenza season. Source: CDC FluVaxView

How to Discuss Vaccine Effectiveness Tips

- **Keep it simple:** “Flu vaccine helps reduce risk of hospitalization and death.”
- **Use a presumptive approach:** “Today we are giving you your annual flu vaccination.”
- **Communicate why we vaccinate:** “Vaccination prevents flu and severe outcomes of flu.” “Preventing the flu also means preventing missed work and helps you avoid doctor appointments and unnecessary medications. It also means preventing flu symptoms that can mimic COVID-19, saving healthcare resources needed for COVID-19 care.”
- **Communicate the variability and unpredictability of flu:** “This is why it is best to get an annual flu vaccination.”
- **Acknowledge that flu vaccination is not always a perfect match with the circulating virus types. But flu and flu-related severe illnesses are common: outbreaks occur almost every year.** “The vaccine is the best way to reduce your risk of flu and its negative outcomes.”

FOOTNOTES

- i CDC. Estimated Influenza Illnesses, Medical visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths in the United States – 2018–2019 Influenza Season. www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/2018-2019.html
- ii CDC. CDC Seasonal Flu Vaccine Effectiveness Studies. www.cdc.gov/flu/vaccines-work/effectiveness-studies.htm
- iii Flannery, 2017, *Pediatrics*. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2016.4244
- iv Ferdinands, 2019, *Journal of Infectious Diseases*. DOI: 10.1093/infdis/jiy723
- v Colquhoun, 1997, *Epidemiology & Infection*. DOI: 10.1017/S095026889700825X
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- vii E. Frentzel, 2020, *JAMDA*. DOI: 10.1016/j.jamda.2019.11.008
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- ix Ferdinands, 2014, *Journal of Infectious Diseases*. DOI: 10.1093/infdis/jiu185
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- xi Thompson, 2014, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. DOI: 10.1093/cid/cit750
- xii Thompson, 2019, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. DOI: 10.1093/cid/ciy737
- xiii Mølgård-Nielsen, 2019, *Journal of Internal Medicine*. DOI: 10.1111/joim.12947
- xiv Poehling, 2011, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*. DOI: 10.1016/j.ajog.2011.02.042