

Communicating the Benefits of Influenza Vaccine during COVID-19

Influenza (flu) severity varies from year to year, but flu always brings serious consequences. Flu outbreaks were limited in the 2020-2021 season due to widespread use of COVID-19 prevention measures like masks and social distancing. But flu viruses never went completely away. As COVID-19 prevention measures are relaxed, it's just a matter of time before flu increases, bringing with it serious complication like pneumonia and heart attacks.

Flu vaccination is the best way to prevent flu and its complications. Everyone age 6 months and older is recommended to get a yearly flu vaccine. This can markedly lower the risk of influenza-related illness, hospitalization, and death. And because flu and COVID-19 share many symptoms, preventing flu means fewer people will need to seek medical care and testing for flu as well as COVID-19, saving time, money and stress. Flu vaccine may be given at the same time as COVID-19 vaccine. Take advantage of every opportunity to remind patients about the importance of flu vaccination.

CDC estimates the annual impact of flu from 2010-2020* ranged from:

9.3 million–45 million
flu illnesses



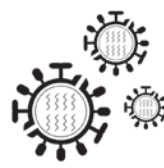
4.3 million–21 million
flu medical visits



140,000–810,000
flu hospitalizations



12,000–61,000
flu deaths



*source: CDC Disease Burden of Influenza (www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden)

What are the Benefits of Seasonal Flu Vaccine?

Research shows flu vaccination¹:

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 children
- ✓ Influenza hospitalizations were cut in half for all adults (including those 65+ years of age)
- ✓ Influenza hospitalizations dropped dramatically among people with chronic health conditions - by 79% for people with diabetes and 52% for those with chronic lung disease
- ✓ Vaccinating long-term care facility (LTCF) staff reduces hospitalizations and deaths in LTCF residents



www.immunize.org/catg.d/p3115.pdf Item #P 3115 (9/21)



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Reduces Severity of Illness in Hospitalized Individuals

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

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

Protects Pregnant Women and Their Babies

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

Vaccination rates* remain well below optimal levels:

- 64%** children 6 months-17 years
- 48%** adults 18+ years
- 70%** adults 65+ years
- 81%** healthcare personnel
- 61%** pregnant women

*Estimates from the 2019-2020 influenza season. Source: CDC FluVaxView (www.cdc.gov/flu/fluvoxview)

TIPS

for Discussing Flu Vaccine

- **Recommend flu vaccine at every clinical encounter:** "I strongly recommend you get a flu vaccination today. Flu vaccine may be given at the same time as COVID-19 vaccine."
- **Keep it simple:** "Flu vaccine helps reduce risk of hospitalizations 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 means preventing missed workdays, doctor appointments, and testing because of flu symptoms. Flu vaccination can also help prevent flu and COVID-19 co-infections, which can cause more severe illnesses."²
- **Communicate the variability and unpredictability of flu:** "Flu was limited when most people followed COVID-19 precautions, but the spread of flu is likely to resume as fewer people wear masks or socially distance. The spread of other respiratory illnesses has already increased."
- **Acknowledge that flu vaccination is not always a perfect match with the circulating virus types. But flu and flu-related severe illnesses are common.** "The vaccine is the best way to reduce your risk of flu and its negative outcomes."

Footnotes

- 1 CDC. What are the benefits of flu vaccination? www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm
- 2 Dao, 2021, *Journal of Clinical Virology Plus*. DOI: 10.1067/j.jcvp.2021.100036