

Health

# Amid COVID-19 pandemic, stop the spread of flu

Amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, with hospitals and health care workers already overburdened, medical experts say it's more important than ever to slow the spread of the flu. In a typical year, the flu causes tens of millions of illnesses, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and tens of thousands of deaths in the U.S.

That is why the Ad Council, the American Medical Association (AMA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the CDC Foundation have launched a new campaign, "No One Has Time for Flu." As part of the campaign, Dr. Susan R. Bailey, M.D., president of the AMA, is sharing important insights about flu vaccination:

- Flu vaccines are safe: The flu vaccine is a safe, effective step that physicians and public health experts recommend to protect patients and their loved ones from getting sick with influenza. This year, doctor's offices and pharmacies are taking steps to ensure vaccines can be provided safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CDC recommends that each year everyone 6 months and older (with rare exceptions) get a flu vaccine early in the season, preferably, before flu is spreading widely.

- Getting one is important this year: Because you can get flu and COVID-19 at the same time, it's especially important for people with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of serious complications -- and their caregivers -- to get their flu shot. At the community level, the potential impact

Did you know **90%** of adults hospitalized with flu have a **chronic condition?**

#FIGHT FLU

There's still time to get your flu shot.

of a bad flu season during the COVID-19 pandemic could be devastating. Getting a flu shot will help keep others healthy and help make sure health care workers and hospitals have the resources to continue to treat COVID-19 patients.

- Flu protection is especially urgent for people of color: Due to longstanding health care inequities, Black and Latinx/Hispanic people are disproportionately affected by underlying conditions which can cause both COVID-19 and flu complications. This results in much greater rates of flu-related hospitalizations. Indeed, a new CDC analysis of 10 flu seasons showed that Black people were hospitalized at a rate twice as high as White people.

Black and LatinX/Hispanic communities are also less likely to get vaccinated due to a range of barriers. CDC data shows that in the 2019-20 flu season, Latinx/Hispanic adults had the lowest flu vaccination coverage (38.3 percent), with non-Hispanic Black

adults next lowest (41.2 percent).

- Getting vaccinated is easy: Vaccines are often free or offered at very low cost. To learn more about safe, affordable flu vaccination, including where to get one in your area, visit [GetMyFluShot.org](http://GetMyFluShot.org). You can also view a short video on flu vaccination by visiting, [youtu.be/cl7wNuU5IU](https://youtu.be/cl7wNuU5IU).

"No one has time to get sick from flu -- especially this year," says Dr. Bailey. "Getting a flu shot is one thing we all can do to help protect ourselves, our families and our communities."

**Steps to help prevent a 'Twindemic'**

In the 2019-20 flu season, influenza caused up to 22,000 deaths in the U.S. This year, with so many medical resources being used to care for COVID-19 patients, it's especially important to protect yourself from the flu.

The annual flu vaccine can help protect you from the flu and lessen severe flu symptoms. It's not too late to get a flu shot, and there

are a number of reasons you should get yours now, if you haven't already.

1. You'll save life-saving resources for COVID-19 patients. Last flu season, influenza sent more than 400,000 people to the hospital with flu complications. By protecting yourself from the flu, you can help save those life-saving hospital beds and ventilators for individuals who may contract COVID-19. While we anxiously await the arrival of a COVID-19 vaccine, there is one vaccine already available that will protect your lung health this winter: the flu shot.

2. Chronic health conditions make flu symptoms worse -- and deadly. The flu can worsen symptoms of chronic health conditions, such as lung or heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Multiple studies have shown an increased risk of heart attack and stroke in

the first few days following the flu, and it can lead to complications among people with diabetes. The flu can also exacerbate symptoms of respiratory disorders, such as asthma and COPD and can lead to pneumonia. Personal stories about individuals who were impacted by the flu can be found by visiting the American Lung Association's [GetMyShot.org](http://GetMyShot.org).

3. Adults over 50 are at higher risk. As we age, our immune systems decline and weaken, placing older adults at greater risk for catching the flu and having severe complications. Over 65% of those hospitalized last flu season were adults over 50. Vaccinating against influenza helps reduce the risk of hospitalizations and dying from the flu for older adults. Yet, despite these benefits, in 2019-2020 only 50% of adults ages 50-64 got their

flu shot.

4. Flu shots protect those around you. Similar to COVID-19, the flu is spread from person to person. By getting a flu shot, you are helping reduce the spread of the flu and protecting your family and friends! For additional information about the flu visit [www.lung.org/flu](http://www.lung.org/flu). For flu shot resources, including finding a location near you to get a flu shot, visit [www.getmyshot.org](http://www.getmyshot.org). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends getting a flu shot every year. Annual vaccination is important as the body's immune response from vaccination declines over time. Now more than ever, the flu shot is critical and necessary to help protect ourselves, those we love and our communities at large, especially people at highest risk of flu complications.

**Additional COVID-19 Mitigation Measures**

As of December 10, 2020

- ▶ Restaurants and bars to continue closing at 11 p.m. and spacing tables 6 ft apart
- ▶ Public gatherings are limited to 50% of capacity (exceptions granted by local health departments)
- ▶ Attendance at youth indoor sporting events is limited to up to 4 spectators per participant, up to 50% of building capacity

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