



Prepare Your Practice To Fight Flu:

Make a Strong Influenza Vaccine Recommendation and Improve Your Influenza Vaccination Rates This Season

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“The thing that motivates me to FIGHT FLU is the ability to prevent illness and death. Flu is a bad disease. It causes millions of illnesses every year, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of deaths, and so anything we can do to prevent that – that is what I want to work on.”

– Daniel B. Jernigan, MD, MPH

Director, Influenza Division, CDC

Learning Objectives

- Understand how to make a strong influenza vaccine recommendation.
- Learn how to answer some common questions about influenza.
- Learn how to answer some common questions about influenza vaccination.
- Understand best practices for increasing influenza vaccination rates in their clinical practices.

2020-2021 Flu Season in Review

Influenza (flu) activity during the 2020–2021 season was unusually low both in the United States and globally, despite high levels of testing.

- The low level of flu activity during this past season contributed to dramatically fewer flu illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths compared with previous flu seasons.
- In the United States, the cumulative rate of laboratory-confirmed influenza-associated hospitalizations was the lowest recorded since this type of data collection began in 2005.
- COVID-19 mitigation measures, like mask wearing, staying home, hand washing, school closures, reduced travel, increased ventilation of indoor spaces, and physical distancing, likely contributed to the low level of flu activity during the 2020–2021 season.



2021-2022 Flu Season: ACIP Recommendations

- The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older receive a flu vaccine every year.
- Immunization providers are recommended to administer any licensed, age-appropriate influenza vaccine (IIV, RIV, or LAIV).
- There is no expressed preference for any flu shot or the nasal spray vaccine.
- More information at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/acip/index.htm>

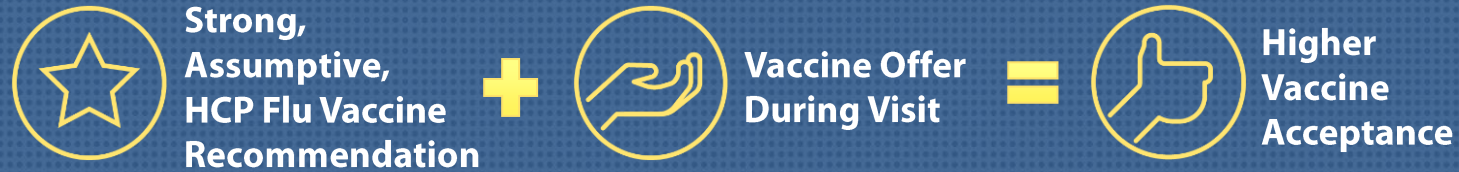
Vaccine Timing Recommendations

September and October are generally good times to be vaccinated for flu. Ideally, everyone should be vaccinated by the end of October.

- **Adults**, especially those older than 65, should **not** get vaccinated early (in July or August) because protection in this group may decrease over time.
- **Children can** get vaccinated as soon as vaccine becomes available—even if this is in July or August. Some children need two doses. For those children it is recommended to get the first dose as soon as vaccine is available because the second needs to be given at least 4 weeks after the first.
- **Early vaccination** can also be considered for **people who are in the third trimester of pregnancy** because this can help protect their infants during the first months of life (when they are too young to be vaccinated).

Importance of a HCP Flu Vaccine Recommendation

- Many consider health care professionals (HCPs) to be their most trusted source of information when it comes to vaccines.



- HCPs have a critical role in helping parents and patients choose vaccines.
- Perceptions about the strength of an HCP's recommendation may have implications for vaccine uptake.
- Flu vaccination can reduce the likelihood of hospitalization and death.

Make a Strong Recommendation Using the SHARE Model

- CDC suggests using the SHARE five-part approach to make a strong flu vaccine recommendation to enable patients to make informed decisions about flu vaccination.



SHARE

the tailored reasons why the recommended vaccine is right for the patient given his or her age, health status, lifestyle, occupation, or other risk factors.



HIGHLIGHT

positive experiences with vaccines (personal or in your practice), as appropriate, to reinforce the benefits and strengthen confidence in vaccination.



ADDRESS

patient questions and any concerns about the vaccine, including side effects, safety, and vaccine effectiveness in plain and understandable language.



REMIND

patients that vaccines protect them and their loved ones from many common and serious diseases.



EXPLAIN

the potential costs of getting the disease, including serious health effects, time lost (such as missing work or family obligations), and financial costs.

Applying the SHARE Model



SHARE the reasons:

- “This vaccine can protect you and your family from getting sick from flu. By getting the vaccine today, you’ll be protecting yourself and the people around you who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like your children and parents.”



HIGHLIGHT positive experiences:

- “CDC recommends that everyone get a flu vaccine each year. I always get one myself so I don’t pass along flu to my patients and my family members.”



ADDRESS patient questions:

- “To answer your question, a flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. There can be some mild side effects, but this is not flu illness. There are different side effects that may be associated with getting a flu shot or a nasal spray flu vaccine.”



REMIND patients that flu vaccines protect them and their loved ones:

- “Flu activity is going to start to pick up, and CDC says to expect more cases in the coming months. That is why I want to make sure I help protect you and your loved ones.”



EXPLAIN the potential costs of flu:

- “It’s important to get vaccinated this season because flu vaccination can reduce potential flu illnesses, doctor visits, and missed work or school due to flu.”

Higher Risk Populations

- Everyone 6 months of age and older should get an influenza vaccine every year. Even healthy adults can get sick with influenza and spread it to others.
- However, vaccination is particularly important for certain patients, like young children, who are at higher risk of serious complications.
- When making an influenza vaccine recommendation to these patients share tailored reasons the flu vaccine is particularly important for their overall health.

Higher Risk Populations: Young Children

“Young children, even healthy young children, are at higher risk for serious flu-related complications. A recent study found that flu vaccination reduced the risk of flu-associated death by half (51%) among children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and by nearly two-thirds (65%) among healthy children.”

Consider bundling influenza vaccine recommendation with other vaccines



Higher Risk Populations: Pregnant People

“Flu is more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant people due to changes in the body, such as the immune system, heart, and lungs that make them more prone to illness. A flu vaccine during pregnancy has been shown to help protect you and your baby from flu during pregnancy and can help protect your baby for several months after birth.”

Consider bundling influenza vaccine recommendation with other vaccines (e.g. Tdap)

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/pregnant.htm>



Higher Risk Populations: Adults 65 Years and Older

“Due to the weakening of your immune system that happens with age, you are at high risk for serious complications from flu. In fact, in recent years, most flu-related hospitalizations and deaths have occurred in people 65 years and older.”

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/65over.htm>



Higher Risk Populations: Adults with Certain Medical Conditions

“People with chronic medical conditions—such as heart disease, diabetes and asthma—are at higher risk for developing flu-related complications, ranging from worsening of these chronic conditions, to pneumonia, and other more severe complications.”

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/>



Addressing Questions and Vaccine Refusals

Every visit with a patient is an opportunity to recommend an influenza vaccine. Patients may have questions. Interpret questions as a request for additional information and be prepared to answer common questions.

- Address questions immediately and apply the SHARE model. Offer influenza vaccine in the same visit.
- If a patient or patients refuses an influenza vaccine, probe for reasons, and provide answers to any concerns.
- If a patient continues to refuse an influenza vaccine, share an informational handout to help advance education beyond the office visit and follow up at a later time.

Increase Vaccination Rates by Removing Common Perceived Barriers

- **Vaccination is not important** → Share vaccine benefit information.
- **Unlikely to get influenza** → Highlight influenza prevalence; CDC estimates that influenza has resulted in between 9 million – 45 million illnesses, between 140,000 – 810,000 hospitalizations and between 12,000 – 61,000 deaths annually since 2010.
- **Influenza is not serious** → Share hospitalization statistics; highlight symptoms and cost-associated.
- **Influenza vaccine causes illness or side effects** → Note extensive research on vaccine benefits and address safety.

Why Should I Get a Flu Vaccine?

- It is estimated that during the 2019-2020 flu season, flu vaccination prevented an estimated 7.52 million flu illnesses, 105,000 hospitalizations, and 6,300 deaths.
- A 2021 study showed that among adults, flu vaccination was associated with a 26% lower risk of ICU admission and a 31% lower risk of death from flu compared to those who were unvaccinated.
- Another 2017 study showed influenza vaccination can reduce a child's risk of influenza-related death by half (51%) among children with underlying high-risk medical conditions by two-thirds (65%) among healthy children.

"A flu vaccine is the best way to help prevent flu and its potentially serious complications. Remember that flu vaccine not only protects you, but it also can help protect those around you."

I Received a Flu Vaccine Last Year and Still Was Sick with Flu

- You may have been exposed to flu before protection from vaccination set in.
- You may have been infected with a flu virus that is different from what is in the vaccine.
- Influenza vaccine can vary in how well it works and some people who get vaccinated still get sick. It's important to remember that there is data that show that vaccination may have made your flu illness less severe than it would have been otherwise.
- Influenza vaccine only protects against influenza, not other respiratory diseases that may feel like flu.

“Flu vaccine is the best available protection against flu. While some people who get a flu vaccine still get sick, vaccination can make their illness less severe.”

I Don't Need a Flu Vaccine, I Have Never Had Flu Before

- Influenza viruses are constantly changing, so getting an influenza vaccine every year is the safest option to obtaining immune protection.
- Influenza can be very serious and getting a flu vaccine also protects people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older adults, and people with certain chronic health conditions.

"A flu virus is one of the fastest mutating viruses and can change year to year. Just because you did not have flu before does not mean you will not in the future. Every year healthy people get the flu who have never had it before."

Flu is Not That Serious

- Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness that can cause severe illness.
- Influenza illness can result in hospitalization or death. Some people, such as older adults, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at higher risk of serious complications.
- Since 2010, CDC estimates that influenza has resulted in between 9.3 million and 45 million illnesses, between 140,000 and 810,000 hospitalizations.

“Flu can be very serious. Every year in the U.S., millions of people get sick, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized, and thousands of people die.

“Beyond serious health consequences, if you’re sick with flu, you risk missing work or school. In fact, flu causes U.S. workers to miss up to 17 million days of work each year.”

“Flu can be mild for some people and serious for others. We can’t say for certain how mild or serious your illness will be.”

What is the Risk of Serious Reactions To a Flu Vaccine?

- Serious allergic reactions to influenza vaccination are very rare.
- The most common side effects from the influenza shot are soreness, redness, tenderness or swelling where the shot was given.
- The viruses in the nasal spray vaccine are weakened. Side effects from the nasal spray may include: runny nose, wheezing, headache, or vomiting.
- If side effects do occur, they usually begin soon after vaccination and are mild and short-lived.

“There can be mild side effects associated with a flu vaccine, but these are much less severe than symptoms often associated with flu illness.”

“There are different side effects that may be associated with getting a flu shot or a nasal spray flu vaccine.”

Can a Flu Vaccine Give You Flu?

- Influenza vaccines do not cause flu illness.
- Influenza shots are currently made in two ways: the vaccine is made either with influenza vaccine viruses that have been killed ('inactivated) and are therefore not infectious, or with no influenza viruses at all (which is the case for recombinant influenza vaccine).
- LAIV does contain live viruses; however, the viruses are weakened, so that they will not cause influenza illness.

“No, you cannot get flu from a flu vaccine. There may be mild side effects, but this is not flu illness.”

Is the Flu Vaccine Safe?

- For more than 50 years, hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received influenza vaccines, and there has been extensive research supporting its safety.
- Side effects from influenza vaccination are generally mild and short-lasting, especially when compared to symptoms of influenza.

“Flu vaccines have an excellent safety record. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines over the past 50 years, and there has been extensive research supporting the safety of flu vaccines.

A flu vaccine is the first and best way to reduce your chances of getting the flu and spreading it to others.”

Additional Tips in Communicating with Patients About Flu Vaccination

- Keep it simple.
- Complement statistics with personal stories.
- Avoid repeating the incorrect information.
- Tie flu vaccination to protecting your loved ones.
- Position annual flu vaccination as an important component to overall management of health.



Techniques to Improve Vaccination Rates

- HCPs report higher vaccination rates when working in practices that involve medical staff in vaccine delivery, offer influenza vaccination during routine visits, have standing orders, and monitor vaccine rates.
- Keep up to date on immunization recommendations by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).
- Create a culture of immunization within your practice.
 - Make clinical resources and informational handouts readily available for staff and patients.
 - Develop standing orders for influenza vaccination.
 - Empower all staff to take every opportunity to recommend influenza vaccination.
- Assess influenza vaccination status at every visit September to March; every visit is an opportunity to recommend an influenza vaccine.
- Send email, call, or text reminders to patients to make an appointment before influenza season and follow-up with missed appointments, especially with high-risk patients.
- Make referrals to other pharmacies if stock is unavailable.

HCP Resources

- [CDC Fight Flu Toolkit](#)
 - Make a Strong Flu Vaccine Recommendation Fact Sheets
 - #HowIRecommend Videos
 - Appointment Reminder Email Template
 - Materials for Patients
 - Pharmacist Guide and Talking Points
 - Maintaining Childhood Immunizations and Well-Child Care During COVID-19 Pandemic
- [Vaccination Guidance During a Pandemic](#)
- Additional Factsheets
 - [Preparing for Questions Parents May Ask about Vaccines](#)
 - [Talking with Parents about Vaccines for Infants](#)
 - [Free print materials](#)