

Communicating the Benefits of Influenza Vaccination

Influenza (flu) severity varies from year to year, but flu season always brings serious consequences. While the 2020–2022 flu seasons were mild due to COVID-19 prevention measures, flu-related hospitalizations returned to pre-pandemic levels during the 2022–23 season. Although flu outbreaks are unpredictable, vaccination is the best protection for any influenza season.

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. Flu vaccination rates have fallen in recent years, leaving more people at risk of severe flu.¹ Take advantage of every opportunity to make a strong recommendation for flu vaccine and other vaccines your patients may need, such as COVID-19, RSV, and pneumococcal vaccines. Flu vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

From October 2023 – June 2024, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that flu caused²

35–65 million
flu illnesses



16–30 million
flu medical visits



390,000–830,000
flu hospitalizations



25,000–72,000
flu deaths



What are the Benefits of Flu Vaccination?

Studies since 2013 have shown that vaccination³

Reduces risk of flu illness

- ✓ In 2019–2020, flu vaccination prevented an estimated 7 million flu illnesses
- ✓ Flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of having to go to the doctor with flu by 40% to 60%

Reduces hospitalization and death

- ✓ Pediatric deaths from flu were cut in half for vaccinated children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and by two-thirds for healthy children
- ✓ Flu hospitalizations were cut in half for all adults (including those aged 65+)
- ✓ Flu hospitalizations dropped dramatically among people with chronic health conditions – by 79% for vaccinated 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

Reduces severity of illness in hospitalized individuals

- ✓ Among vaccinated adults hospitalized with flu, intensive care unit (ICU) admissions decreased by more than half (59%), and they spent fewer days in the ICU compared to unvaccinated hospitalized people
- ✓ 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 vaccinated adults with existing cardiovascular disease was reduced by more than one-third

Protects pregnant people and their babies

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

Vaccination rates* for flu remain well below optimal levels

- 57% children 6 mos–17 yrs (same)
- 47% adults 18+ years (3%↓)
- 70% adults 65+ years (4%↓)
- 76% healthcare personnel (4%↓)
- 47% pregnant people (1%↓)

*Estimates are for 2022–23 season (change is from 2021–22)¹

Quick Tips

How to discuss flu vaccination

- **Recommend flu and other needed vaccines at every clinical encounter:** “I strongly recommend you get your flu vaccine today. It can be given at the same time as other vaccines.”
- **Keep it simple:** “Flu vaccine helps reduce your risk of hospitalization and death.”
- **Use a presumptive approach:** “Today we are giving you your annual flu vaccine.”
- **Communicate why we vaccinate:** “Vaccination prevents flu and its severe complications.” “Preventing the flu means preventing missed workdays and doctor appointments.”
- **Communicate the variability and unpredictability of flu:** “Flu seasons are unpredictable. The best way to prepare for any season is to get a flu vaccine.”
- **Acknowledge that flu vaccines are not always a perfect match with the circulating virus strains:** “While the flu vaccine won't prevent all illnesses, it is the best way to reduce severe flu illness and its complications.”

Use the SHARE method⁴

- **Share** why a flu vaccine is right for a patient
- **Highlight** positive experiences with flu vaccines
- **Address** patient questions
- **Remind** patients a flu vaccine can protect them and their loved ones from serious complications
- **Explain** the potential costs of getting sick with flu

FOOTNOTES

- 1 CDC. www.cdc.gov/fluview/about
- 2 CDC. 2023–24 U.S. Flu In-Season Burden. www.cdc.gov/flu/flu-burden/php/data-vis/2023-2024.html
- 3 CDC. What are the benefits of flu vaccination? www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm
- 4 CDC. Make a Strong Influenza Vaccine Recommendation. www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/flu-vaccine-recommendation.htm

