



HEALTH ALERT

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2021-2022 FLU SEASON ALERT

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The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) is sending out this reminder to get immunized against the flu. The current flu season is underway and can last until May 2022. While influenza activity is still low overall nationally, an increase in influenza A (H3N2) viruses has been detected in recent weeks nationally and in Pennsylvania. It was recently reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) that 80% of flu cases so far this year have been in children and young adults with the H3N2 influenza virus. This virus has been associated with more severe flu season in the past for individuals age 65 and older and young children. **A flu shot will help protect you against the flu viruses that are circulating.**

This season, flu shots (quadrivalent inactivated influenza vaccine [IIV4], recombinant influenza vaccine [RIV4]) and the nasal spray ([live attenuated influenza vaccine \[LAIV4\]](#))¹ are available. Your healthcare practitioner can recommend the appropriate vaccine. **Individuals are encouraged to receive their flu vaccine to help prevent an increase in cases due to holiday activities and travel.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during [2019-2020](#)² flu vaccination prevented an estimated 7.5 million influenza illnesses, 3.7 million influenza-associated medical visits, 105,000 influenza-associated hospitalizations, and 6,300 influenza-associated deaths. Even when vaccination does not prevent infection it can reduce the severity of influenza illness, helping to decrease serious outcomes including hospitalization and death.³ **Flu vaccine and COVID-19 vaccine can be given at the same visit for those eligible to receive both.**

What do I need to know for the 2021 - 2022 flu season?

Get immunized against the flu annually. The CDC recommends those who are aged 6 months and older get a flu shot each year. Flu shots are especially important for those at risk for complications and for their caregivers.

This is a list of all the health and age factors that are known to increase a person's risk of getting serious complications from flu:

- People 65 years and older
- Children younger than 2 years old (Although all children younger than 5 years old are considered at higher risk of serious flu complications, the highest risk is for those younger than 2 years old, with the highest hospitalization and death rates among infants younger than 6 months old).
- People who have certain medical conditions including asthma, neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions, chronic lung disease(chronic obstructive pulmonary disease[COPD] and cystic fibrosis), endocrine disorders (diabetes mellitus), heart disease (congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure, and coronary artery disease), blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease), kidney disorders, liver disorders, and metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders), stroke.
- People who are obese with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 or higher.
- People younger than 19 years old on long-term aspirin- or salicylate-containing medications.
- People with a weakened immune system due to disease (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or some cancers such as leukemia) or medications (such as those receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer, or persons with chronic conditions requiring chronic corticosteroids or other drugs that suppress the immune system).

- Other people at higher risk from flu:
- People who are pregnant: duration of the pregnancy and up to two weeks after.
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People of certain ancestral backgrounds who are at increased risk for hospitalization with flu, including non-Hispanic black persons, Hispanic or Latino persons, Native Americans and/or Alaskan Native peoples.⁴

Do I need a flu vaccine every year?

Yes. A flu vaccine is needed every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. The flu vaccine is created each year to keep up with the flu viruses as they change. There are different types of vaccines available, and your healthcare provider can recommend which is best. The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to provide protection from the flu.⁵

Is there treatment if I get sick with the flu?

Yes. If you get sick, there are drugs that can treat flu illness. They are called antiviral drugs and they can make your illness milder and help you feel better faster. They also can prevent serious flu-related complications, such as pneumonia.⁶

Can I do anything else to prevent the flu?

Yes. In addition to getting the flu vaccine, you can take everyday preventive actions to stop the spread of germs. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, limit contact with others. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with viruses that cause flu.⁷

Do I have the flu or a cold?

The flu and the common cold have similar symptoms. Symptoms such as fever, body aches, tiredness, and cough are more common and intense with the flu. If these symptoms are present, contact your health care practitioner to determine the best course of treatment.⁸

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS	COLD	FLU
Symptom onset	Gradual	Abrupt
Fever	Rare	Usual
Aches	Slight	Usual
Chills	Uncommon	Fairly common
Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Usual
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate	Common
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Headache	Rare	Common

The flu can lead to serious complications. Immediate medical care should be sought for the following symptoms

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- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- In children: Bluish skin, not drinking enough, not waking up or not interacting, irritability (not wanting to be held), fever with a rash or when flu symptoms improve, but then return with a fever and worsening cough.
- For a review of signs and symptoms which require immediate, 9-1-1 involvement, see ODP Health Alert “[Call 9-1-1 in a Medical Emergency.](#)”

Having the flu can also increase your chances of getting pneumococcal pneumonia. A vaccine for this type of pneumonia is available. Discuss with your health care practitioner if you should receive the pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine.

Where can I get more information about flu?

The CDC has a wealth of information about flu and preventing flu. Their websites, listed below, contains posters and fact sheets that you can use to spread the word about preventing flu. Likewise, the PA Department of Health’s website on influenza is an excellent resource. For information about where to get a flu shot, you can contact your health care provider or your local Department of Health regional office. Many pharmacies give flu shots, and you can find out from your health insurer if there is a cost for the shot. This CDC website [Vaccines.gov - Search for flu vaccine locations](#) has a flu vaccine finder. Simply enter your zip code to find a flu vaccine location near you, and resources with additional information.

References:

1. PA Department of Health, Seasonal Influenza Updates and Reminders- [Health Alert Network, 2021- PAHAN – 611-12-08-UPD](#)
2. [Estimated Influenza Illnesses, Medical visits, and Hospitalizations Averted by Vaccination in the United States — 2019–2020 Influenza Season | CDC](#) Last reviewed August 3, 2021
3. [What are the benefits of flu vaccination? | CDC](#) Last reviewed August 26, 2021
4. CDC: People at Higher Risk of Flu Complications. [What are the benefits of flu vaccination? | CDC](#), Last reviewed November 18, 2021
5. [Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine | CDC](#) Last reviewed November 18, 2021
6. [Flu Treatment | CDC](#) Last reviewed October 15, 2021
7. [Preventive Steps | CDC](#) Last reviewed November 18, 2021
8. [Cold Versus Flu | CDC](#) Last reviewed September 16, 202