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## **Most People Hospitalized With the Flu Have a Chronic Illness**

*Leading public health organizations say it's not too late to help protect yourself and others by getting a flu shot*

**ARLINGTON, Va., CHICAGO and DALLAS (February 6, 2023)** – Leading health organizations are urging people to get a flu shot if they haven't already done so. Compared to last year's mild flu season,<sup>i</sup> the U.S. has already seen more than three times the number of flu-related deaths.<sup>ii</sup> While seasonal influenza activity shows a declining trend,<sup>iii</sup> flu season is expected to continue well into spring.

The American Heart Association<sup>®</sup>, the American Lung Association<sup>®</sup> and the American Diabetes Association<sup>®</sup> are teaming up to send a message to people who have not yet received this season's flu vaccine: It's not too late to protect yourself and others, some of whom are more vulnerable to the dangers of the flu, by getting your flu shot.

While no one wants to experience the misery of the flu, for many people with chronic conditions, the flu causes serious complications, leading to hospitalization or in some instances death. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in recent years, about 9 out of every 10 people who were in the hospital due to the flu had at least one underlying medical condition.<sup>iv</sup>

The underlying health conditions that commonly put adults at higher risk of complications from the flu include heart disease, history of stroke, type 1 or type 2 diabetes, obesity and chronic lung disease such as asthma, [cystic fibrosis](#) and [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](#).<sup>v</sup>

"Adults who have cardiovascular disease face a significant risk of complications if they contract the flu," said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., M.P.H., FAHA, the American Heart Association's chief medical officer for prevention. "For example, if you have heart disease and you're not vaccinated against the flu, you are six times more likely to have a heart attack within a week of infection. The flu vaccine can be doubly protective—from bad flu and from its complications. While earlier in the season is ideal, we have a lot of flu season left, and it's better to get one now than not at all."

With the U.S. flu season typically peaking mid-to late winter, between December and February,<sup>vi</sup> experts say those who haven't gotten the flu shot yet should do so as soon as possible. By getting vaccinated, individuals are not only protecting themselves but those around them who may not be able to get vaccinated or who have a weakened immune response to vaccines.

"Even a minor respiratory virus can be hard on someone with lung disease, and the flu is especially challenging," said Dr. Albert Rizzo, M.D., chief medical officer for the American Lung Association. "We want to reiterate that not only should people with any chronic illness get a flu shot, but their loved

ones and friends should also protect them by getting the flu vaccine. It's imperative that we slow the spread of the flu this year as much as possible to continue to decrease the number of cases and hospitalizations, and to protect our most vulnerable loved ones."

Many of these same chronic conditions also put individuals at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, so it is important to also stay up to date on the COVID vaccine. Health professionals recommend the flu shot for anyone 6 months of age and older, and say it is safe to get a flu vaccine along with a COVID-19 booster. They also urge those 65 and older to ask about the flu vaccines recommended for their age and get the best one that's available at that location at that time.

"In recent years, almost a third of the people hospitalized due to the flu had diabetes,"<sup>vii</sup> said Robert Gabbay, M.D., chief scientific and medical officer for the American Diabetes Association. "The impact from any illness can pose a threat to someone with diabetes, especially considering many people who live with diabetes have other complications like heart disease and kidney disease. Staying up to date on all annual vaccines and the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for everyone who is eligible, especially those living with diabetes and other chronic illness."

The [American Heart Association](#), the [American Lung Association](#), and the [American Diabetes Association](#) all offer educational resources about the burden of flu and increased need for vaccination among people with chronic health conditions on their websites.

## About the American Diabetes Association

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) is the nation's leading voluntary health organization fighting to bend the curve on the diabetes epidemic and help people living with diabetes thrive. For 82 years, the ADA has driven discovery and research to treat, manage, and prevent diabetes while working relentlessly for a cure. Through advocacy, program development, and education we aim to improve the quality of life for the over 133 million Americans living with diabetes or prediabetes. Diabetes has brought us together. What we do next will make us Connected for Life. To learn more or to get involved, visit us at [diabetes.org](https://diabetes.org) or call 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383). Join the fight with us on Facebook ([American Diabetes Association](#)), Spanish Facebook ([Asociación Americana de la Diabetes](#)), LinkedIn ([American Diabetes Association](#)), Twitter ([@AmDiabetesAssn](#)), and Instagram ([@AmDiabetesAssn](#)).

## About the American Heart Association

The American Heart Association is a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. We are dedicated to ensuring equitable health in all communities. Through collaboration with numerous organizations, and powered by millions of volunteers, we fund innovative research, advocate for the public's health and share lifesaving resources. The Dallas-based organization has been a leading source of health information for nearly a century. Connect with us on [heart.org](https://heart.org), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or by calling 1-800-AHA-USA1.

## About the American Lung Association

The American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy and research. The work of the American Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to champion clean air for all; to improve the quality of life for those with lung disease and their families; and to create a tobacco-free future. For more information about the American Lung Association, which has a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator and is a Platinum-Level GuideStar Member, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) or visit: [Lung.org](https://www.lung.org).

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<sup>i</sup> CDC webpage Past Seasons Estimated Influenza Disease Burden accessed Jan. 25, 2023:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/past-seasons.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report updated Jan. 20, 2023 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm#ILIMap>

<sup>iii</sup> Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report updated Jan. 20, 2023 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm#ILIMap>

<sup>iv</sup> Xu X, Blanton L, Elal AIA, et al. Update: Influenza Activity in the United States During the 2018-19 Season and Composition of the 2019-20 Influenza Vaccine. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2019;68(24):544-551. doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm6824a3.

<sup>v</sup> CDC online article, "A Chronic Health Condition Can Increase Your Risk" accessed Jan. 25, 2023:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/chronic-conditions/index.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> CDC Flu Season webpage, accessed Jan. 25, 2023 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season.htm>

<sup>vii</sup> CDC online article, "A Chronic Health Condition Can Increase Your Risk" accessed Jan. 25, 2023:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/chronic-conditions/index.htm>