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Complications from flu largely preventable with annual flu vaccine

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

ARLINGTON, Va., BETHESDA, Md., CHICAGO and DALLAS (December 4, 2023) – During National Influenza Vaccination Week (December 4-8, 2023), leading public health organizations are encouraging everyone to get a flu shot if they have not already done so. The flu is more than an inconvenience: it can lead to hospitalization, worsening of chronic medical conditions or even death. An annual flu vaccine is the best way to help prevent complications from the flu. ¹

The American Heart Association®, the American Lung Association®, the American Diabetes Association® and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases are teaming up to reach those who have not yet received a flu vaccine this season with an important message: it's not too late to protect yourself and others by getting your flu shot.

Even if you are not at higher risk for a serious case of the flu, getting vaccinated helps protect those around you who are more vulnerable, like people age 65 and older and people with chronic conditions like heart disease or stroke, diabetes or lung disease. According to the U.S. 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.²

Although the best time to get vaccinated in the U.S. is in the fall, before flu viruses begin spreading in your community,³ experts say those who haven't gotten a flu vaccine yet should do so as soon as possible.

“Virtually everyone can benefit from a flu shot, and that’s especially true for people with chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes who have weakened immune systems and have worse flu if they get it,” said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., M.P.H., FAHA, the American Heart Association’s chief medical officer for prevention. “Even if you feel well now or think you can fight off the flu if you get it, it

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/flu/index.html>

² 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.

³ CDC Flu Season webpage, accessed Nov. 8, 2023 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/index.html>



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is important to get vaccinated to protect the loved ones around you who may be at higher risk for dangerous complications.”

“Last fall, we saw cases of the flu increase earlier than typical years. Thankfully, flu vaccination provided substantial protection for people across the U.S.,” said Albert Rizzo, M.D., chief medical officer for the American Lung Association. “We know that getting a flu shot is the best way to help protect yourself, your family and your community against flu and severe illness from the flu. And this protection is especially important for certain people at increased risk for developing serious complications such as those living with chronic medical conditions including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other chronic lung diseases.”

If you are over 65, you should ask about getting one of the three flu vaccines that are specifically recommended for your age, because studies have shown they trigger a better immune response in older adults than standard flu vaccines. However, if one of the specific vaccines is not available, you should still get whatever vaccine is available, as they all provide some protection and can lessen complications from flu. Additionally, it is safe to get the flu shot at the same time as an updated COVID-19 vaccine or booster for COVID-19.

“In recent years, almost a third of the people hospitalized due to the flu had diabetes,”^[1] said Robert Gabbay, MD, PhD, the ADA’s chief scientific and medical officer. “The threat of flu and COVID is particularly high 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.”

According to a National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) survey, more than 1 in 4 US adults (28%) who are at higher risk for flu-related complications, including older adults and people with chronic health conditions, said they were not planning to get vaccinated this season. “This is concerning because this season is likely to be more complex, as in addition to flu and COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is also circulating,” said NFID Medical Director Robert H. Hopkins, Jr., MD. “Fortunately, we now have vaccines to help protect against all 3 of these viruses. Getting vaccinated is critical to help protect yourself, your family, and your community from serious disease and potential complications.”

^[1] 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>



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

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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](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#) 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](#).

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 83 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](#) 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](#)).



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About the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases

Founded in 1973, the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to educating and engaging the public, communities, and healthcare professionals about infectious diseases across the lifespan. NFID promotes a Take 3 approach to help prevent illness: 1) Get vaccinated; 2) Practice healthy habits to help stop the spread of infectious diseases (wash hands often, stay home when sick, cover coughs and sneezes, and consider wearing a mask if you or a household member are at increased risk of severe illness); 3) Treat with prescription medication if recommended by a healthcare professional. For more information, visit www.nfid.org.

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