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2021 FLU SEASON

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It's hard to believe that summer is coming to an end, and we are approaching flu season! You have likely seen multiple ads instructing you to get your flu shot, but given the current climate with the pandemic, you may have questions. We hope the below helps to answer those.

First, there are several different flu vaccines to choose from, nine to be exact! Does it really matter which you get? If you are confused, you aren't the only one!

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE 2021-2022 FLU SEASON

We never know how bad the flu season will be. We do know last year's flu season was unusually mild compared to prior years. This is likely due to high flu vaccine rates as well as increased social distancing and hand washing due to COVID. No one is sure if we can expect the same this year.

Even though the flu vaccine cannot protect you against all strains of the flu, it's still one of the best ways to prevent getting sick with the flu. The CDC recommends that everyone age six months and over be vaccinated.

WHICH VACCINE IS BEST?

This year, all nine FDA-approved vaccines are quadrivalent—they protect against four different types of influenza or flu. Your doctor, health care provider, or pharmacy will likely not cover all nine vaccines. If you have particular allergies, speak to your health care provider about the best vaccine for you.

The flu strains included in the flu shot include:

- Two type A flu viruses ([H1N1](#) and [H3N2](#))
- Two type B viruses ([Victoria](#) and [Yamagata lineages](#))

This means no matter which vaccine you receive, you are protected against the same four flu strains. Each year, flu shots are usually 40–60% effective. There are special considerations for those over age 65, however. As we get older, our immune systems don't work as well, and we have a

harder time fighting illness. For those over age 65, the following three vaccines are recommended:

- Fluzone High-Dose Quadrivalent—also known as the "[high-dose flu shot](#)"
- Fluad Quadrivalent
- Flublok Quadrivalent

If one of these three vaccines isn't available, you should get vaccinated with whatever is available. It's better to be vaccinated sooner rather than waiting for a particular vaccine to become available.

WHAT IF I AM ALLERGIC TO EGGS?

Many flu vaccines are made using chicken eggs. Some people who have severe egg allergies can have life-threatening allergic reactions to these vaccines. If you are one of these people, Flucelvax Quadrivalent and Flublok Quadrivalent are two egg-free flu vaccine options. Be sure to check with your doctor before receiving a vaccine.

WHAT IF I AM AFRAID OF NEEDLES?

If you are afraid of needles, there is a nasal spray option available, FluMist Quadrivalent. This vaccine is only approved by the FDA for people between ages two and 49. It's also a "live vaccine," meaning it contains weakened versions of the flu viruses instead of inactivated (dead) viruses. Pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals should not receive this version of the vaccine.

WHEN SHOULD I GET MY FLU VACCINE?

Our bodies take about two weeks to develop an immunity from the flu shot. It is recommended you get your flu vaccine about two weeks before the flu season, likely September or October. If you get your flu shot too early, you may not be protected the entire flu season.

CAN I GET THE FLU FROM THE FLU VACCINE?

No! The virus in the vaccine is either dead, or for the FluMist, extremely weak. Because

of this, flu vaccines are unable to cause the flu. However, some will experience flu-like symptoms due to the body's immune response. All symptoms will go away in a few days. The symptoms may include:

- A sore, red, or swollen arm
- A headache
- Low fever
- Muscle aches
- Tiredness

Unfortunately, it's still possible to get sick with the flu after you've received your flu vaccine. It takes about two weeks for your body to develop immunity. During this time, it is possible to get the flu. In addition, the flu shot is only 40–60% effective, so it is possible to get sick with a strain of the flu that was not included in the vaccine.

HOW LONG WILL THE FLU SHOT LAST?

The immunity you obtain from the flu vaccine will only last six months. That's why it is important to be vaccinated every year.

CAN I GET A FLU SHOT AT THE SAME TIME AS MY COVID-19 VACCINE OR BOOSTER?

With all the talk of COVID vaccines and upcoming booster shots, many are wondering if they can get both at the same time. The answer is yes.

Last year, when the COVID vaccines first came out, it was recommended not to administer it with any other vaccines, including the flu shot. Now that the vaccine has been around for a while, it has been found that giving the COVID shot with any other vaccines does not diminish its effectiveness or cause any additional side effects. That means you can get the COVID Booster Shot with the flu shot! Both will be a separate shot and you may want to get them in separate arms.

If you prefer not to get your flu shot and COVID booster at the same time, it's just as reasonable to separate them by the originally recommended 14 days.