



Preparing For Flu Season During a Pandemic: What You Need to Know

By Sherry Thomas, RN Consultant at LeaderStat

Every fall, healthcare providers prepare for the challenges associated with “flu season.” This year providers will face unique challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Healthcare providers must understand the similarities and differences between the two viruses. With this understanding, providers can better protect those they serve.

What is the difference between Influenza (flu) and COVID-19?

The flu and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2, while the flu is caused by infection with influenza viruses. While the flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, there are some key differences between the two. Individuals will require testing to confirm a diagnosis.

To help those you serve, it’s important to understand the varying signs and symptoms of both viruses. It is important to note that not everyone with the flu or a COVID-19 infection will have a fever. Some infected individuals may show no symptoms (asymptomatic) or may have very severe symptoms.

Common symptoms shared by COVID-19 and the flu	Additional symptoms for COVID-19	COVID-19 symptoms that may indicate an emergent situation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fever or feeling feverish/chills Cough Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing Fatigue (tiredness) Sore throat Runny or stuffy nose Muscle pain or body aches Headache Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New onset of confusion New loss of taste and/or smell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trouble breathing Persistent pain or pressure in the chest New onset confusion Inability to wake or stay awake Bluish lips or face Persistent pain or pressure in the chest

Vaccines – what you need to know for the 2020-2021 flu season

New vaccines licensed for use during the 2020-2021 flu season

There are two new vaccines licensed for use during the 2020-2021 flu season. The first is a high-dose vaccine licensed for use in adults 65 years and older. This vaccine replaces the previously licensed trivalent high-dose vaccine. The second new vaccine available is a quadrivalent adjuvanted vaccine licensed for use in adults 65 years and older. This vaccine is like the previously licensed trivalent vaccine containing MF59 adjuvant, but it has one additional influenza B component.

Recommended flu vaccines for the 2020-2021 flu season

For the 2020-2021 flu season, providers may choose to administer any licensed, age-appropriate flu vaccine with no preference for any one vaccine over another.

- Standard dose flu shots.
- High-dose shots for people 65 years and older.
- Shots made with adjuvant for people 65 years and older.
- Shots made with virus grown in cell culture. No eggs are involved in the production of this vaccine.

Individuals who should get flu vaccinations

Remember, you cannot get the flu from a flu vaccine. Routine annual influenza vaccination is recommended for all persons aged six months and above who do not have contraindications. There is an emphasis placed on vaccination of high-risk groups and their caregivers, including:

- Children aged six months through five years
- Adults aged 50+
- Persons with chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (excluding isolated hypertension), renal, hepatic, neurologic, hematologic, or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus)
- Persons who are immunocompromised due to any cause, including (but not limited to) medications or HIV infection
- Women who are or will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Children and adolescents (aged six months through 18 years) receiving aspirin- or salicylate-containing medications who might be at risk for Reye syndrome associated with influenza
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- American Indians/Alaska Natives
- Persons who are extremely obese (BMI greater than or equal to 40 for adults)

An emphasis placed on vaccination also includes caregivers and contacts of those at risk, including:

- Health care personnel, including all paid and unpaid persons working in healthcare settings who have the potential for exposure to patients and/or to infectious materials, whether they are directly involved in patient care or not.

- Household contacts and caregivers of children aged less than five years, particularly contacts of children aged less than six months, and adults aged greater than or equal to 50 years.
- Household contacts and caregivers of persons with medical conditions associated with an increased risk of severe complications from influenza.

Timing of vaccinations

Vaccines should be administered by the end of October; however, vaccination should continue to be offered if the flu virus is circulating locally. Even if you think you have already had the flu, get vaccinated as you can potentially become infected with a different strain of the flu in the same season.

Storage and handling of flu vaccines

In all cases, the manufacturer packaging information should be consulted for guidance regarding the storage and handling of influenza vaccines. For guidance on specific situations not addressed in packaging materials, contact the manufacturer directly. Additional information can always be found in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Vaccine Storage and Handling Toolkit.

In general, vaccines should be protected from light and stored at the recommended temperature (refrigerated between 36° to 46° F). Any vaccine that has been frozen should be discarded.

There are two types of vials: single-dose and multidose. Single-dose vials should not be accessed for more than one dose. Multidose vials should be returned to recommended storage conditions between uses, and, after initial use, should never be kept beyond the recommended period. Multidose vials may include a Beyond Use Date (BUD) label in addition to their expiration date. The BUD specifies the number of days the vaccine may be used once accessed for the first time. If there is no BUD, use the expiration date.

Ways to stay healthy

During flu season, it is important to practice good hygiene. To stay healthy, follow these tips:

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with warm water and soap, especially after touching shared objects like elevator buttons, doorknobs, telephones, TV remotes. You may use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid shaking hands. Use your knuckles or a barrier such as a paper towel when touching keypads, doorbells, elevator buttons, etc.
- If you are coughing or sneezing, use a tissue or your elbow. Dispose of used tissues immediately, and be sure to wash your hands after disposing of the tissue.
- Avoid touching your face, eyes, or mouth.



This year, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it is important to avoid unnecessary travel and crowds.

CMS response to Coronavirus and latest program guidance

<https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/Emergency/EPRO/Current-Emergencies/Current-Emergencies-page>

CDC interim infection prevention and control recommendations

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/basics/faq.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/index.html>

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