

Flu Season/COVID-19 FAQs

How will flu season impact the COVID-19 pandemic?

During the fall and winter months of 2020 – 2021, flu and COVID-19 are likely to be active in our communities at the same time. It will be important to do what you can to help protect both yourself and your family in order to prevent getting sick from either one. By getting a flu vaccine for you and your eligible family members, you can reduce your risk of serious illness, complications and hospitalizations while keeping your loved ones and your community safer.

For more information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), visit [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) and [Influenza \(Flu\)](#).

Can I have COVID-19 and flu at the same time?

It is possible to have flu and COVID-19 at the same time. It is not clear how often this has occurred or how common it will be.

Some COVID-19 symptoms and flu symptoms are the same. How can I tell the difference between these two illnesses?

Although caused by different viruses, COVID-19 and flu are both contagious respiratory illnesses and can have similar symptoms, at least at first. Both can cause fever, chills, sore throat, congestion, fatigue, muscle aches and cough. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea with both the flu and COVID-19; this is more common in children than adults. Both can also cause shortness of breath or difficult breathing, although this can be more serious with COVID-19. Another COVID-19 symptoms, different from the flu, is loss of taste or smell.

This [table](#) compares the two illnesses. Learn more about this subject by watching [this video](#).

Why should I get the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine helps protect you, your loved ones and your community from flu. More people vaccinated means more people are protected. The flu vaccine also has been shown to help [prevent serious medical events](#) associated with some chronic conditions, like heart and lung disease, and diabetes.

Why should my child get the flu vaccine?

Children are more likely than other age groups to get sick from flu. Children younger than 5 years old are at a higher risk of developing serious complications from flu. You can reduce your child's risk of getting sick with the flu vaccine.

How do I get a flu vaccine?

You can schedule an appointment to get a flu vaccine either at your primary care physician's office or at one of our Immediate Care Centers. Appointments are required at both locations. Northwestern Medicine is taking every precaution to offer flu vaccines in a safe environment with minimal contact. You can also go to your local pharmacy to get the vaccine.

Who should get vaccinated against seasonal flu?

Anyone who wants to reduce their chance of getting seasonal flu should get vaccinated. However, the vaccine is particularly important for certain people who are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for high-risk persons, including:

- Children ages 6 months to 18 years
- Pregnant women
- People age 50 and older
- People of any age with chronic medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease, and diabetes
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - Healthcare workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from flu
 - Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children under the age of 6 months (these children are too young to be vaccinated)

Who should not get the flu vaccine?

Some people should not get the flu vaccine without first consulting a physician. They include:

- People with allergies to flu vaccine, eggs or any ingredient in the vaccine
- Children under the age of 6 months
- People who have a history Guillain-Barré syndrome
- People who are not feeling well on the day they are scheduled to get the vaccine

Is the flu vaccine safe?

The flu vaccine has been given in the United States for more than 50 years, and severe reactions are extremely rare. Before approving a flu vaccine for public use, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [evaluates the vaccine for safety and effectiveness](#). The FDA also ensures that all vaccines comply with its strict [Current Good Manufacturing Process regulations](#). The CDC and FDA continually monitor the safety of flu vaccines and have a [platform](#) to identify and report any adverse reactions.

Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?

[The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu](#). The vaccine does not contain a live virus. It can cause mild effects such as redness, pain and swelling at the injection site.

I got sick last year after I received the vaccine. Why?

The flu vaccine does not work instantly. It can take about two weeks after you receive the vaccine to develop immunity to flu, and you could become sick during that time through exposure to flu. You may also be sick with another type of respiratory illness such as the common cold. The flu vaccine only protects against flu.

It seems like the flu vaccine isn't always effective. Why should I get it?

The effectiveness of the flu vaccine can vary from season to season. In a typical year, it reduces the risk of flu between 40% and 60% in the population. If you do get flu despite getting the vaccine, vaccination can reduce the likelihood that you will need to see your physician or be hospitalized due to flu. It can help prevent serious complications from flu for those with chronic health conditions such as heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and diabetes. The flu vaccine also help protects women during and after pregnancy.

Most importantly, getting the flu vaccine helps protect your loved ones.

What else can I do to keep from getting sick this winter?

- Wear a mask.
- Maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance from others.
- Wash your hands frequently.

How do I get a COVID-19 test?

Northwestern Medicine offers COVID-19 testing at multiple locations in Chicago and surrounding communities. A Northwestern Medicine physician's order is required for testing. The order must designate the location for your test. If you do not have an order for testing, contact your Northwestern Medicine physician or visit a Northwestern Medicine Immediate Care Center for an evaluation to determine if a test is needed.

A list of [current testing locations and details can be found here](#). Please note that locations may change.

How do I get a COVID-19 test for my child?

Children can be tested at many Northwestern Medicine locations. A Northwestern Medicine physician's order is required for testing. The [current testing locations and details, including the ages tested, can be found here](#). Please note that locations may change.

How can I get an order for a COVID-19 test if I don't have a Northwestern Medicine primary care physician?

You can visit a Northwestern Medicine Immediate Care Center, where a healthcare provider will examine you and order a test if needed. Walk-in evaluations are available at all sites. Visit [nm.org/immediate](https://www.northwesternmedicine.org/immediate) to schedule a virtual visit or submit your name as a walk-in to let us know that you are coming.

Where are the COVID-19 testing site locations, and when are they open?

A list of the [current testing locations and details can be found here](#). Please note that locations may change.

How do I get my COVID-19 test results?

COVID-19 test results will be sent via MyNM, powered by MyChart. If you do not already have a MyNM account, you will receive a code to set up an account.

What if I still have questions?

If you have additional questions about COVID-19, please contact the Northwestern Medicine COVID-19 Hotline by calling 312.47.COVID (312.472.6843), TTY 630.933.4833.

If you have questions about whether or not you should get the flu vaccine, consult your healthcare provider.