



Protect Your Patients This Flu Season

Pharmacist Guide & Talking Points





Pharmacists play a critical role in protecting patients against seasonal influenza and influenza-related complications by advocating for and administering influenza vaccines and supporting adherence with CDC's influenza antiviral recommendations. While clinical practices have limited hours and typically require appointments, pharmacies often have longer hours, convenient locations, and many do not require appointments, offering another accessible avenue for patients to get their annual influenza vaccines.

CDC Flu Vaccine Recommendations

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older receive an influenza vaccine every year.

Vaccination against influenza is specifically important for people at high risk of influenza-related complications, including:

- Children younger than 5 years, especially younger than 2 years
- Adults 65 years and older
- Pregnant women and women up to two weeks postpartum
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- American Indians and Alaska natives
- People who have certain medical conditions, including:
 - » Asthma
 - » Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions (including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle, such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy [seizure disorders], stroke, intellectual disability, moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury)
 - » Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
 - » Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure, and coronary artery disease)
 - » Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
 - » Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
 - » Kidney disorders
 - » Liver disorders
 - » Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
 - » Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, cancer, or those on chronic steroids)
 - » Children and adolescents receiving aspirin or salicylate-containing medications
 - » People with extreme obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or more)

Types of Seasonal Influenza Vaccines

VACCINE TYPE	VACCINE DESCRIPTION
Trivalent (3-component) standard dose inactivated	Contains the three most common influenza viruses predicted to be circulating. Check package information for appropriate age.
Quadrivalent (4-component) standard-dose inactivated	Contains the three common influenza viruses predicted to be circulating, plus an additional B virus component. Check package information for appropriate age.
Adjuvanted & High-Dose trivalent inactivated	Two different vaccines, both designed to create a stronger immune response. Approved for persons aged 65 years and older.
Recombinant	Produced without the use of the influenza virus or chicken eggs. Approved for persons aged 18 years and older.
Live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV)	Produced using weakened influenza viruses and given via nasal spray. For healthy non-pregnant persons aged 2 through 49 years.



For more information, [cdc.gov/flu/professionals](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals) or call **1-800-CDC-INFO**

Egg Allergies

People with egg allergies can receive any licensed, recommended age-appropriate influenza vaccine and no longer have to be monitored for 30 minutes after receiving the vaccine. People who have severe egg allergies should be vaccinated in a medical setting and be supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions.

Strategies to Increase Influenza Vaccination Rates in Your Pharmacy

Screen for High-Risk Patients

- CDC recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older receive an influenza vaccine, but pharmacists can help identify patients through incoming referrals and prescriptions for whom influenza vaccination is especially important, particularly patients at high risk for developing influenza-related complications.
- If patients have not received their influenza vaccine, pharmacists have an opportunity to offer a flu vaccine on-site.

Advocacy and Promotion

- Pharmacists can share newsletters, posters, brochures, and other promotional materials to highlight the risk of influenza and the importance of influenza vaccination.
- Pharmacists also can partner with local health departments and nonprofit advocacy groups to promote influenza vaccines among high-risk groups and the general public.

Talking Points: How to Give a Strong Recommendation

Apply the CDC SHARE Model

SHARE is a five-part approach that health care professionals can use to communicate with patients about the importance of influenza vaccines and to enable patients to make informed decisions:

S	SHARE the tailored reasons why the recommended vaccine is right for the patient given his or her age, health status, lifestyle, occupation, or other risk factors.	<i>"This vaccine can protect you and your family from getting sick from flu. By getting a flu vaccine today, you'll be protecting yourself and the people around you who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like your children and parents."</i>
H	HIGHLIGHT positive experiences with vaccines to reinforce the benefits and strengthen confidence in vaccination.	<i>"The CDC recommends that everyone get a flu vaccine each year. I always get one myself so I don't pass along flu to my patients and my family members."</i>
A	ADDRESS patient questions and any concerns about the vaccine, including side effects, safety, and vaccine effectiveness in plain and understandable language.	<i>"A flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. There can be some mild side effects, but this is not flu illness. There are different side effects that may be associated with getting a flu shot or a nasal spray flu vaccine."</i>
R	REMIND patients that vaccines protect them and their loved ones from many common and serious diseases.	<i>"Flu activity is going to start to pick up, and CDC says to expect more cases in the coming months. That is why I want to make sure I help protect you and your loved ones."</i>
E	EXPLAIN the potential costs of getting the disease, including serious health effects, time lost (such as missing work or family obligations), and financial costs.	<i>"It's important to get vaccinated this season because flu vaccination can reduce potential flu illnesses, doctor visits, and missed work and school due to flu. Flu vaccination also has been shown to reduce the risk of hospitalization and can be life-saving for children. Most of the children who die from flu each year have not been vaccinated."</i>



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Address Patient Questions

When patients express hesitation about getting an influenza vaccine, take the opportunity to identify their concerns and address any questions or misconceptions they may have about influenza or influenza vaccination using the CDC SHARE Model.

Some common patient questions can include:

Do flu vaccines work?

- Flu vaccines are effective in reducing the risk of flu illness and its potentially serious complications, though their effectiveness varies each year.
 - » It is estimated that during the 2016–2017 flu season, flu vaccination prevented an estimated 5.29 million illnesses, 2.64 million medical visits, and 84,700 hospitalizations associated with influenza.
- Recent flu vaccine effectiveness studies show that flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu illness by between 30% and 60% generally.
- Flu vaccination may make your illness milder if you do get sick.
- Flu vaccination can reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalization, including among children, older adults, and others who are more vulnerable to serious flu complications.
 - » A [2017 study](#) showed that flu vaccination reduced deaths, intensive care unit (ICU) admissions, ICU length of stay, and overall duration of hospitalization among hospitalized flu patients.
 - » Flu vaccination has been associated with lower rates of some cardiac events among people with disease as well as reduced hospitalizations among people with diabetes (79%) and chronic lung disease (52%).
 - » Another [2017 study](#) showed flu vaccination can reduce a child's risk of flu-related death by half (51%) among children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and by two-thirds (65%) among healthy children.

I've heard that some people get a flu vaccine and still get sick with flu.

- That's possible, but there is data to show that your illness will be milder if you do get sick because you were vaccinated.

Can a flu vaccine give me the flu?

- No. There can be some mild side effects, but this is not flu illness.

Do I need a flu vaccine every year?

- CDC recommends a flu vaccine for everyone 6 months and older every year for two reasons:
 - » First, a person's immune protection from vaccination declines over time and therefore, an annual vaccine is needed for optimal protection.
 - » Second, because flu viruses are constantly changing, the formulation of the flu vaccine is reviewed each year and sometimes updated to keep up with changing flu viruses.

How severe was the 2017-2018 flu season? Did the flu vaccine offer protection against flu?

- The 2017–18 season was a high severity season across all age groups.
- Overall hospitalization rates for all ages were the highest ever recorded in the CDC surveillance system, breaking the previously highest record during the 2014-2015 flu season.
- There were 179 flu-related deaths in children, exceeding the highest number of deaths in 2012-2013.
- Early vaccine effectiveness estimates were that the 2017-2018 vaccine was 36% effective against all flu, meaning the flu vaccine reduced a person's overall risk of having to seek medical care for flu illness by 36%.
- A flu vaccine is the best way to prevent flu and its potentially serious complications.



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Share Additional Information

If the conversation does not lead to an influenza vaccine administered that day, pharmacists can share the CDC patient flyer or another informational brochure that the patient can take home to review and consider for the future.

CDC Antiviral Recommendations for Seasonal Flu

CDC recommends antiviral medications for treatment of influenza as an important adjunct to annual influenza vaccination. If a patient becomes sick with influenza, antiviral drugs may be a treatment option. Antiviral drugs can lessen symptoms and shorten the time patients are sick by 1 or 2 days and can prevent more serious influenza-related complications, like pneumonia and respiratory failure.

Antiviral treatment is recommended as early as possible, ideally within 48 hours of symptom onset, for any patient with confirmed or suspected influenza, who is hospitalized, has severe or progressive illness, or is at high risk for influenza-related complications. Clinical judgment is based on a patient's disease severity and progression, age, underlying medical conditions, likelihood of influenza, and time of onset of symptoms.



For more answers to common misconceptions, [visit CDC's website.](#)

References

- **CDC MMWR: Influenza Activity In the United States During The 2017–18 Season and Composition of the 2018–19 Influenza Vaccine**
https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6722a4.htm?s_cid=mm6722a4_w
- **ASHP Guidelines on the Pharmacist's Role in Immunization**
<https://www.ashp.org/-/media/assets/policy-guidelines/docs/guidelines/pharmacists-role-immunization.ashx?la=en&hash=84FB763202C4EFA6034EF80A2765401AE92B7B4D>
- **CDC Make a Strong Flu Vaccine Recommendation**
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/flu-vaccine-recommendation.htm>
- **CDC Misconceptions about Seasonal Flu and Flu Vaccines**
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/misconceptions.htm>
- **CDC Vaccine Effectiveness**
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/vaccineeffect.htm>
- **CDC What are the benefits of flu vaccination?**
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm>
- **CDC Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine**
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm>



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