

Critical care and pulmonary societies encourage flu shots amid COVID spread

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The members of the Critical Care Societies Collaborative, which includes the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN), American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), and Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM), strongly urge individuals to get vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus and to

receive their influenza (flu) immunizations for the upcoming flu season.

In most years, flu is a major cause of critical illness, respiratory failure, and death. Last winter was an exception, likely because the precautions taken to prevent transmission of the SARS CoV-2 virus were also effective at reducing the spread of flu. With adherence to mask wearing and social distancing waning, we risk returning to prior years' rates of infection. For example, there were 380,000 hospitalizations and 20,000 deaths caused by flu in 2019-2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Current forecasts for an active flu season foreshadow the potential for lives lost and further stress on a health care system that is already stretched far beyond resource capacity.

Flu vaccination is also critical for patients with lung diseases. Every year, flu affects adults with COPD, asthma, and pulmonary fibrosis worse than the general population. People over age 65 and people with impaired immunity are also at higher risk of death. Flu can be especially severe in [young children](#), for whom the mortality rate can be higher than in healthy adults. Children younger than 6 months, who are too young to receive the [flu vaccine](#), depend on adults to be vaccinated to protect them. For all of these people, vaccines against COVID-19 and flu are an important component of personal and community protection against serious illness and death.

"Influenza and the COVID-19 vaccinations help individuals protect themselves and their communities," says AACN President Beth Wathen, MSN, RN, CCRN-K. "For those who are eligible, vaccination supports the best health outcomes for everyone. Flu vaccination can reduce the number of patients who need hospitalization and lessen their impact on a health care system already overburdened by caring for those with COVID-19."

"COVID has not made influenza disappear. Getting vaccinated against

the flu is the best thing that everyone can do right now to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities, especially as we head into the holiday season and hope to gather with friends and family," said ATS President Lynn Schnapp, MD, ATSF.

"Both the flu and COVID-19 can be incredibly dangerous for people with chronic health problems. The absolute best way to provide protection for yourself and those around you is to get vaccinated," says CHEST President Steven Q. Simpson, MD, FCCP. "The vaccinations for COVID-19 and the flu are proven to be safe for all eligible individuals, are readily available, and can be given at the same time. There is no reason not to receive your vaccinations before this flu season."

"Influenza vaccination is the most safe and effective way to avoid severe forms of influenza and to save lives," says SCCM President Greg Martin, MD, MSc, FCCM. "Influenza hospitalizes hundreds of thousands each year, all too often leading to critical illness and need for prolonged ICU care. Influenza vaccination can prevent the 50,000 or more people who die of [influenza](#) each year in the United States alone."

Everyone 6 months or older is recommended to get a flu shot annually, since the flu strains can change each year. The best time to get the shot is in the early fall before there are widespread cases, but it is not too late to get the shot throughout the flu season.

Provided by American College of Chest Physicians

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