

A jab in each arm: France vaccinates against flu and COVID

October 22 2021, by John Leicester

Worried that the flu and COVID-19 could trigger a winter-time double-whammy of new infections and deaths, France is forging ahead with a nationwide vaccination and booster-shot program against both diseases, offering simultaneous jabs to millions of at-risk people.

The annual flu vaccination campaign kicked off Friday, four days earlier than initially planned, dovetailing with France's COVID-19 vaccination program that as well as trying to reach those who remain unvaccinated is also providing booster shots to those in need.

French health authorities, in instructions issued this week, urged doctors, nurses, pharmacists and midwives to "systematically promote both vaccinations" to at-risk people eligible for COVID-19 booster and flu shots. The note said the jabs can be given the same day, one in each arm.

It added that the onset of the winter flu season with the pandemic ongoing "increases the risk of co-infection and the development of serious cases and deaths."

French health authorities also fear that because there were fewer flu infections in 2020, because of social distancing and coronavirus lockdowns, people could be more vulnerable this winter.

"The flu could be strong this year—I stress 'could'—because we had no flu last year and so the population's immunity is lower," Health Minister Olivier Veran said on BFM-TV.

The flu vaccination campaign was already underway in elderly care homes, which got a [green light](#) to start giving jabs from Monday.

Those immediately eligible for flu jabs include all those aged 65 and above, [pregnant women](#), people of all ages with [chronic illnesses](#) or obesity, [health professionals](#), home-helpers for at-risk people and families with vulnerable new-borns under 6 months old.

France's COVID-19 booster-shot campaign launched in September, targeting many of the same people now prioritized for free flu shots. They include the over-65s, care-home residents, the chronically sick and recipients of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson [vaccine](#).

Close to 50 million people in France—nearly 74% of the population—are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and more than 1.2 million others have had a first shot.

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