

Most people hospitalized with the flu have a chronic illness

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Leading health organizations are urging people to get a flu shot if they haven't already done so. Compared to last year's mild flu season, the U.S. has already seen more than three times the number of flu-related deaths. While seasonal influenza activity shows a declining trend, flu season is expected to continue well into spring.

The American Heart Association, the American Lung Association and the American Diabetes Association are teaming up to send a message to people who have not yet received this season's flu vaccine: It's not too late to protect yourself and others, some of whom are more vulnerable to the dangers of the flu, by getting your [flu shot](#).

While no one wants to experience the misery of the flu, for many people with chronic conditions, the flu causes serious complications, leading to hospitalization or in some instances death. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in recent years, about 9 out of every 10 people who were in the hospital due to the flu had at least one underlying [medical condition](#).

The underlying health conditions that commonly put adults at higher risk of complications from the flu include [heart disease](#), history of stroke, type 1 or type 2 diabetes, obesity and [chronic lung disease](#) such as asthma, cystic fibrosis and [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (COPD).

"Adults who have cardiovascular disease face a significant risk of complications if they contract the flu," said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., M.P.H., FAHA, the American Heart Association's chief medical officer for prevention. "For example, if you have heart disease and you're not vaccinated against the flu, you are six times more likely to have a heart attack within a week of infection. The flu vaccine can be doubly protective—from bad flu and from its complications. While earlier in the season is ideal, we have a lot of [flu season](#) left, and it's better to get one now than not at all."

With the U.S. flu season typically peaking mid-to late winter, between December and February, experts say those who haven't gotten the flu shot yet should do so as soon as possible. By getting vaccinated, individuals are not only protecting themselves but those around them

who may not be able to get vaccinated or who have a weakened immune response to vaccines.

"Even a minor respiratory virus can be hard on someone with lung disease, and the flu is especially challenging," said Dr. Albert Rizzo, M.D., chief medical officer for the American Lung Association. "We want to reiterate that not only should people with any [chronic illness](#) get a flu shot, but their loved ones and friends should also protect them by getting the flu vaccine. It's imperative that we slow the spread of the flu this year as much as possible to continue to decrease the number of cases and hospitalizations, and to protect our most vulnerable loved ones."

Many of these same [chronic conditions](#) also put individuals at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, so it is important to also stay up to date on the COVID vaccine. Health professionals recommend the flu shot for anyone six months of age and older, and say it is safe to get a flu vaccine along with a COVID-19 booster. They also urge those 65 and older to ask about the flu vaccines recommended for their age and get the best one that's available at that location at that time.

"In recent years, almost a third of the people hospitalized due to the flu had diabetes," said Robert Gabbay, M.D., chief scientific and medical officer for the American Diabetes Association. "The impact from any illness can pose a threat to someone with diabetes, especially considering many people who live with diabetes have other complications like heart disease and kidney disease. Staying up to date on all annual vaccines and the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for everyone who is eligible, especially those living with diabetes and other chronic illness."

More information: [1] CDC webpage Past Seasons Estimated Influenza Disease Burden accessed Jan. 25, 2023:
www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/past-seasons.html

[2] Weekly U.S. Influenza Surveillance Report updated Jan. 20, 2023
www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/index.htm#ILIMap

[3] Xu X, Blanton L, Elal AIA, et al. Update: Influenza Activity in the United States During the 2018-19 Season and Composition of the 2019-20 Influenza Vaccine. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2019;68(24):544-551. DOI: [10.15585/mmwr.mm6824a3](https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6824a3).

[4] CDC online article, "A Chronic Health Condition Can Increase Your Risk" accessed Jan. 25, 2023: www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/chron...conditions/index.htm

[5] CDC Flu Season webpage, accessed Jan. 25, 2023
www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season.htm

[6] CDC online article, "A Chronic Health Condition Can Increase Your Risk" accessed Jan. 25, 2023: www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/chron...conditions/index.htm

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