

# Updated COVID shots are coming. They're part of a trio of vaccines to block fall viruses

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Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, receives a flu vaccine from Nurse Practitioner Whitney Goggans at the Atlanta Press Club, where Cohen spoke about health issues, Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2023, in Atlanta. Cohen says the U.S. is in “our strongest position yet” to avoid another chaotic respiratory season. “There will be a lot of virus this winter. That’s why we want to get ahead of it.” Credit: AP Photo/Mike Stewart, File

Updated COVID-19 vaccines are coming soon, just in time to pair them with flu shots. And this fall, the first vaccines for another scary virus called RSV are rolling out to older adults and pregnant women.

Doctors hope enough people get vaccinated to help avert another "triple-demic" like last year when hospitals were overwhelmed with an early flu season, an onslaught of RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, and yet another winter coronavirus surge.

COVID-19 hospitalizations have been steadily increasing since [late summer](#), although not nearly as much as this time last year, and RSV already is on the rise in [parts of the Southeast](#).

Approval of updated COVID-19 shots is expected within days. They are among the tools the new director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says will help put the U.S. in "our strongest position yet" to avoid another chaotic respiratory season.

"There will be a lot of virus this winter. That's why we want to get ahead of it," CDC chief Dr. Mandy Cohen said.

Here is what you need to know about fall vaccinations:

## **WHY MORE COVID-19 SHOTS?**

The ever-evolving coronavirus isn't going away. Similar to how flu shots are updated each year, the Food and Drug Administration gave COVID-19 vaccine makers a new recipe for this fall.

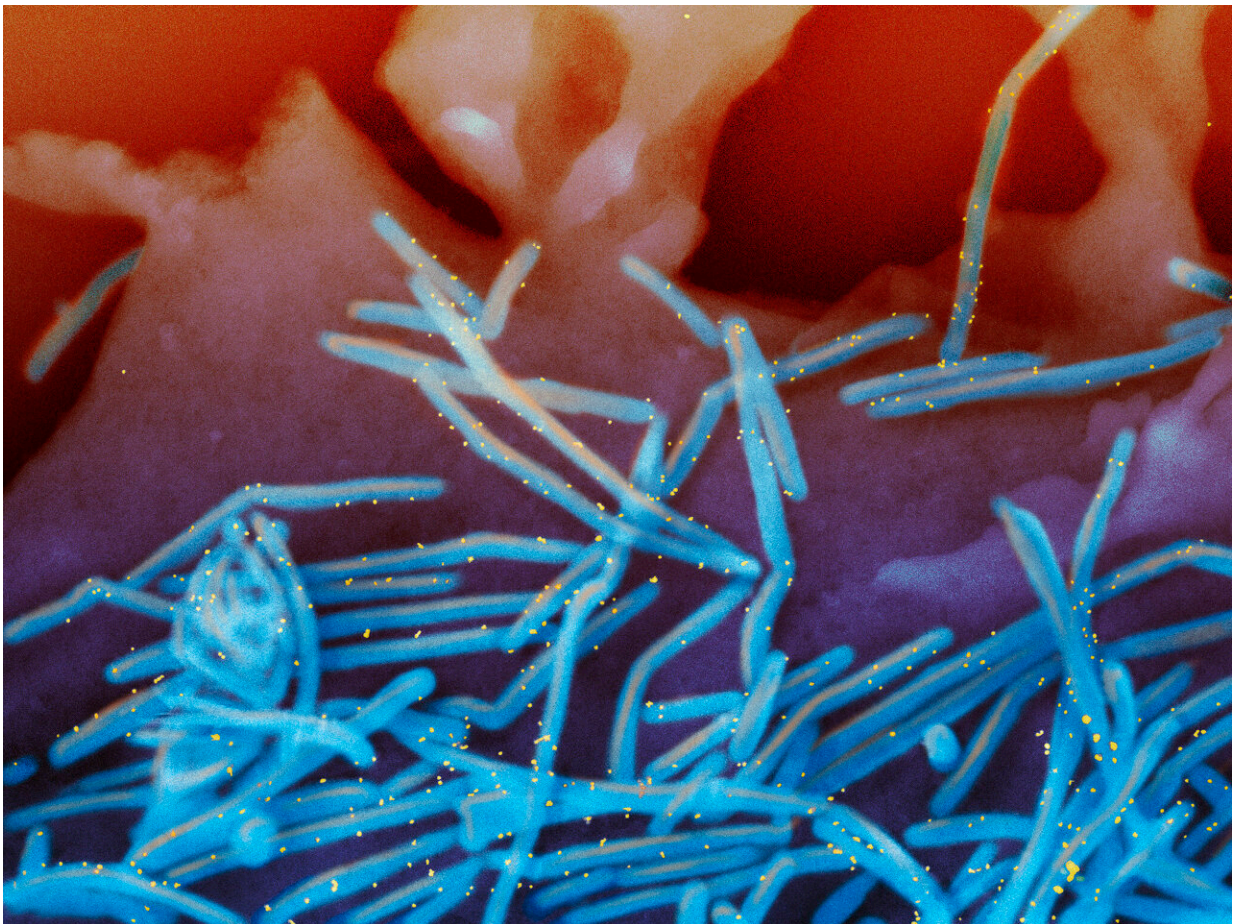
The updated shots have a single target, an omicron descendant named XBB.1.5. It's a big change. The COVID-19 vaccines offered since last year are combination shots targeting the original coronavirus strain and a much earlier omicron version, making them very outdated.



Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax all have brewed new supplies.

The FDA will soon decide if each company has met safety, effectiveness and quality standards. Then the CDC must sign off before vaccinations begin. A CDC advisory panel is set to meet Tuesday to make recommendations on how best to use the latest shots.

Earlier this month, European regulators authorized Pfizer's updated vaccine for this fall, for adults and children as young as 6 months.



This electron microscope image provided by the National Institutes of Health shows human respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) virions, colorized blue, and anti-RSV F protein/gold antibodies, colorized yellow, shedding from the surface of

human lung cells. The first vaccines to guard against RSV are rolling out in 2023 for older adults and pregnant women. Credit: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH via AP, File

## **WILL THEY BE EFFECTIVE ENOUGH?**

Health officials are optimistic, barring a new mutant.

As expected, XBB.1.5 has faded away in the months it took to tweak the vaccine. Today, there is a soup of different coronavirus variants causing illness and the most common ones are fairly close relatives. Recent lab testing from vaccine makers and other research groups suggest the updated shots will offer crossover protection.

Earlier vaccinations or infections have continued to help prevent severe disease and death but protection wanes over time, especially against milder infections as the virus continually evolves. While the FDA did allow seniors and others at high risk to get an extra booster dose last spring, most Americans haven't had a vaccination in about a year.

"The best thing people can do to maintain a normal way of life is to continue to get their booster shots," said Duke University vaccine expert David Montefiori.

## **WHO ALSO NEEDS A FLU VACCINE?**

The CDC urges a yearly flu shot for pretty much everyone ages 6 months and up. The best time is by the end of October.

Like with COVID-19, influenza can be especially dangerous to certain groups including the very young, older people and those with weak

immune systems and lung or heart disease.

There are multiple kinds of flu vaccines to choose from, including a nasal spray version for certain younger people. More important, there are three shots specifically recommended for seniors to choose from because they are proven to do a better job revving up an older adult's immune system.

## **CAN I GET A FLU SHOT AND COVID-19 SHOT AT THE SAME TIME?**

Yes.

The CDC says there is no difference in effectiveness or side effects if people get those vaccines simultaneously, although one in each arm might be more comfortable.





Syringes with vaccines are prepared at the L.A. Care and Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plans' Community Resource Center where they were offering members and the public free flu and COVID-19 vaccines Oct. 28, 2022, in Lynwood, Calif. Updated COVID-19 vaccines are expected in the latter half of 2023 — just in time to pair them with flu shots. Credit: AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill, File

## WHAT IS THIS NEW RSV VACCINE?

RSV is a cold-like nuisance for most people, and not as well-known as the flu. But RSV packs hospitals every winter and can be deadly for children under 5, the elderly and people with certain high-risk health problems. Most notorious for inflaming babies' tiny airways, leaving them wheezing, it's also a common cause of pneumonia in seniors.

RSV vaccines from GSK and Pfizer are approved for adults 60 and older. The CDC is advising seniors to ask their doctor if they should get the one-dose shot.

The FDA also has approved Pfizer's RSV vaccine to be given late in pregnancy so moms-to-be pass the protection to their newborns. CDC recommendations on that use are expected later this month.

Also still to come: advice on whether RSV vaccines should be given together with flu and COVID-19 shots.

## **WHAT ABOUT BABIES AND RSV?**

There is one more new shot parents may hear about this fall: an injection of lab-made antibodies to guard babies from RSV.

That is different than a vaccine, which teaches the body to make its own infection-fighting antibodies, but is similarly protective.

The FDA recently approved Beyfortus, from Sanofi and AstraZeneca. The one-dose drug is recommended for all infants younger than 8 months before their first RSV season.

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