

# Flu shot season is here: Why you (and your kids) need one

October 9 2023, by Cara Murez

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It's time to get the flu shot. They're important not just for adults, but also

for children, and keeping the whole family safe, according to an expert in pediatrics.

"You never know how bad a [flu season](#) will be," said Dr. Mona Patel, attending physician in the department of general pediatrics at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "We like to think of flu shots as [preventive care](#); getting one lessens the chances of more severe symptoms that may cause children to be hospitalized."

Several major health groups—the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Infectious Diseases Society of America—recommend that everyone aged six months and older get a flu shot.

Even if this doesn't keep you from getting the flu, it can prevent severe and secondary illness related to it.

Children who have conditions that put them at increased risk of illness are among those who especially need a [flu vaccine](#), Patel said.

Vaccines are designed to stimulate the production of antibodies in the body. These can then attach to the outer structures on the protein coat of the virus, disabling it.

Epidemiologists and immunologists at the CDC look at global patterns for flu to predict which formulation the current year's flu shots should have.

"If you got a flu shot last spring—basically, if you got it during the last flu season—it may not be effective against the flu that is circulating this season," Patel said. "You never know which variant will be passing through, which is why the [vaccine](#) needs to be reformulated for every new flu season. That's why we say it's important for people to get their

flu shots every single year."

Typically, flu season starts around October and lasts through April.

Getting a [flu shot](#) at the beginning of flu season can maximize the benefits, Patel said, but it's still better to get it late than to not get it at all.

"You want to get it early enough that it has maximal effect a few weeks later," she advised. "At the same time, I don't want folks to say, 'I missed it back in September and October, so I shouldn't get it.' If it's flu season, you should get the shot. It's better to have some protection than none."

The season can overlap with outbreaks of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and COVID-19. What that means is that even an average flu season can strain the [health care system](#), according to analysis from the CDC's Center for Forecasting and Outbreak Analytics.

Forecasters have nicknamed the potentially overlapping outbreak of all three a "triple-demic."

Patel remains hopeful that vaccines will make a difference. For the first time in U.S. history, vaccines for all three major respiratory viruses—flu, RSV and COVID-19—are available.

"Making sure that you are up to date on the vaccines recommended for you is an important strategy to prevent [severe disease](#) and protect yourself and others around you," Patel said. "The more we can convince the public to use a [public health](#) preventive approach, the more effects we'll see in the community."

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on seasonal [flu vaccine](#).

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