

# Complications from flu largely preventable with annual flu vaccine

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During National Influenza Vaccination Week (December 4-8, 2023), leading public health organizations are encouraging everyone to get a flu shot if they have not already done so. The flu is more than an inconvenience: it can lead to hospitalization, worsening of chronic medical conditions or even death. An annual flu vaccine is the best way

to help prevent complications from the flu.

The American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, the American Diabetes Association, and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases are teaming up to reach those who have not yet received a flu vaccine this season with an important message: it's not too late to protect yourself and others by getting your [flu shot](#).

Even if you are not at higher risk for a serious case of the flu, getting vaccinated helps protect those around you who are more vulnerable, like people age 65 and older and people with [chronic conditions](#) like heart disease or stroke, diabetes, or [lung disease](#). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in recent years, about 9 out of every ten people who were in the hospital due to the flu had at least one underlying medical condition.

Although the best time to get vaccinated in the U.S. is in the fall, before flu viruses begin spreading in your community, experts say those who haven't gotten a [flu vaccine](#) yet should do so as soon as possible.

"Virtually everyone can benefit from a flu shot, and that's especially true for people with chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes who have weakened immune systems and have worse flu if they get it," said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., M.P.H., FAHA, the American Heart Association's chief medical officer for prevention. "Even if you feel well now or think you can fight off the flu if you get it, it is important to get vaccinated to protect the loved ones around you who may be at higher risk for dangerous complications."

"Last fall, we saw cases of the flu increase earlier than typical years. Thankfully, flu vaccination provided substantial protection for people across the U.S.," said Albert Rizzo, M.D., chief medical officer for the American Lung Association.

"We know that getting a flu shot is the best way to help protect yourself, your family, and your community against flu and [severe illness](#) from the flu. And this protection is especially important for certain people at increased risk for developing serious complications such as those living with chronic medical conditions including asthma, [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (COPD) and other chronic lung diseases."

If you are over 65, you should ask about getting one of the three flu vaccines that are specifically recommended for your age because studies have shown they trigger a better immune response in older adults than standard flu vaccines. However, if one of the specific vaccines is unavailable, you should still get whatever vaccine is available, as they all provide some protection and can lessen complications from flu. Additionally, it is safe to get the flu shot at the same time as an updated COVID-19 vaccine or booster for COVID-19.

"In recent years, almost a third of the people hospitalized due to the flu had diabetes," said Robert Gabbay, MD, Ph.D., the ADA's chief scientific and medical officer. "The threat of flu and COVID is particularly high 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 illnesses."

According to a National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) survey, more than 1 in 4 US adults (28%) who are at higher risk for flu-related complications, including [older adults](#) and people with chronic health conditions, said they were not planning to get vaccinated this season.

"This is concerning because this season is likely to be more complex, as in addition to flu and COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is

also circulating," said NFID Medical Director Robert H. Hopkins, Jr., MD. "Fortunately, we now have vaccines to help protect against all 3 of these viruses. Getting vaccinated is critical to help protect yourself, your family, and your community from serious disease and potential complications."

Provided by American Heart Association

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