

CDC advises updated COVID vaccine for everyone over 6 months of age

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As a summer wave of COVID infections rolls across the country, U.S. health officials have recommended that all Americans over the age of 6 months get one of the updated COVID vaccines when they become

available this fall.

The [recommendation](#) was issued Thursday by the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention after its vaccine advisory panel weighed in on who should get the shots. The panel made the same recommendation for flu vaccinations this fall, with rare exceptions.

"Our top recommendation for protecting yourself and your loved ones from respiratory illness is to get vaccinated," CDC Director Dr. Mandy Cohen said in a statement. "Make a plan now for you and your family to get both updated flu and COVID vaccines this fall, ahead of the respiratory virus season."

By now, nearly all Americans have had a COVID infection, gotten a COVID vaccine or both, but the updated vaccines offer a timely boost as immunity wanes and the virus continues to evolve, the CDC said.

"Professionals and the public in general do not understand how much this virus has mutated," said Carol Hayes, the CDC vaccine advisory committee's liaison to the American College of Nurse-Midwives, the New York Times reported.

"COVID is still out there, and I don't think it's ever going away," Dr. Steven Furr, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians, told the Times.

For Americans who decide to get the latest COVID shots, there will be a choice among this year's vaccines: The Novavax shot will target JN.1, the variant that prevailed during the winter, while the Pfizer and Moderna shots will take aim at KP.2, which until recently seemed poised to become the dominant variant.

But two related variants, KP.3 and LB.1, now account for [more than half](#)

of new cases. All three variants are descendants of JN.1.

While mutations are thought to help the variants [evade immune defenses](#) and spread faster, there is no evidence they cause more [severe illness](#), the CDC has said.

The biggest risk factor for severe illness is age. Americans 65 and older account for two-thirds of COVID hospitalizations and 82% of in-hospital deaths, according to the CDC. Yet, only about 40% of Americans in that age group were immunized with the COVID vaccines that were offered last fall, the Times reported.

"This is an area where there's a lot of room for improvement and could prevent a lot of hospitalizations," said Dr. Fiona Havers, a CDC researcher who presented the hospitalization data, the Times reported.

Children—particularly those under the age of 5—are also vulnerable, but only about 14% got COVID vaccines last fall, the Times reported.

Even if children do not fall ill themselves, they can fuel circulation of the virus, especially once they return to school this fall, Furr said.

"They're the ones that, if they're exposed, are more likely to bring it home to their parents and to their grandparents," he said. "By immunizing all groups, you're more likely to prevent the spread."

It is also "critical that pregnant persons get vaccinated, not only to protect themselves but also to protect their infants until they are old enough to be vaccinated," panelist Dr. Denise Jamieson, dean of the Carver College of Medicine at the University of Iowa, told the Times.

During the advisory panel meeting, CDC researchers did say they have detected that Pfizer's COVID vaccine may trigger four more cases per 1

million shots of a rare neurological condition known as Guillain-Barré syndrome.

More information: The CDC has more on [COVID vaccines](#).

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