

## **Why Get a Flu Vaccine This Year? Black Coalition Against COVID 19**

### **September 10, 2020**

During this time when we are all focused on the COVID pandemic, it's easy to forget that the seasonal flu virus is about to make its unwanted appearance. While the COVID virus is definitely more dangerous than the traditional influenza virus, the flu is not a trivial disease. In fact, the flu can be serious, causing up to 800,000 hospitalizations and, depending on the year since 2010, causes between 12,000-61,000 deaths from pneumonia, dehydration, or worsening of other health problems. Even if you're healthy, it is still possible to end up with a case of high fever, body aches, and bad cough that could put you down for weeks.

We are particularly worried that the simultaneous experience with both of these viruses which have somewhat similar symptoms will produce uncertainty, worsen anxiety, and place strains on our health system. Therefore, we want you to know the facts and then take control over your health by getting your seasonal flu shot, and ensuring that your family does as well. Please read this guidance carefully because our community is being deliberately flooded with misinformation that incorrectly suggests that the flu shot itself will make you sick or is designed to harm you. Don't fall for it. Read the facts and then take charge of your health.

#### **Why you should get a flu shot:**

- Flu vaccination can keep you from getting sick with flu - Flu vaccine prevents millions of people getting flu illness every year

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- Flu vaccination is an especially important to prevent hospitalizations for people at higher risk for having severe flu. Those at high risk include:
  - People with chronic conditions such as asthma, COPD, diabetes, heart disease and those who have had a stroke.
  - Adults 65 and older.
  - Pregnant women.
  - People who have HIV or AIDS.
  - People who have cancer.
- Flu vaccination helps protect women and their babies, during and after pregnancy.
  - Vaccination lowers the risk of a pregnant woman's risk of being hospitalized with flu by an average of 40 percent.
  - A flu vaccine given during pregnancy helps protect the baby from flu for several months after birth
- Flu vaccine can be lifesaving in children - babies and young children are especially at risk from the flu. It is recommended that children begin getting vaccinated for the flu beginning at 6 months of age because vaccination protects children from getting sick enough to be hospitalized and sometimes even protects them from dying.
- Friends, family and those you are around will thank you - Getting vaccinated helps protect people around you, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness.

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- And, as we mentioned above, there is a serious concern that both the COVID and influenza viruses will be making people sick this Fall and Winter. The symptoms of both infections are similar, so they might be confused for each other. The more cases of flu we can prevent with vaccination, the easier it will be for health care providers to know who has coronavirus and who doesn't. While it will not protect you from getting the coronavirus, the benefits of flu vaccination are significant.

**Can the flu shot give me the flu?** No. Your arm may be sore but there is no live flu virus in the shot so it can't transmit the flu. If you get sick after getting the shot, you may have already have been infected, or you caught a strain of the flu virus that was not prevented by that specific shot. But even if it's not a perfect match for the flu strain circulating that year, the vaccine can reduce how long and how serious the flu illness will be if you do get infected.

**Does the shot have dangerous ingredients?** No. It is made with a preservative that contains a very low level of mercury that does not threaten your health. If you don't want mercury in your shot, you can ask for one that doesn't have the preservative. The vaccine also has trace amounts of egg protein so those who have allergies to eggs should consult their doctors first. People who have a rare condition called Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) probably shouldn't take it. The CDC notes that the GBS risk is about 1 or 2 additional cases per million people vaccinated – significantly lower than the risk of severe complications from the flu itself. (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/thimerosal.htm>). The point is, and we can't emphasize this enough, is that the flu shot is safe and should be key aspect of your personal and family health promotion/ disease prevention strategy.

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**When is the best time to take the vaccine?** The vaccine is available during flu season, typically Fall and Winter. October is a good time to get your flu shot - before influenza (flu) virus shows up in your community, and late enough so that it is likely to protect you for the entire flu season, which usually is over by May. The flu shot is covered by most insurance plans, and can be found through your job, college health center, doctor's office/clinic and most urgent cares and pharmacies.

**Special note for people over 65.** In addition to the regular flu shot, there are two special versions recommended for people over 65. These are slightly stronger than the normal shot . We recommend that you consult with your health professional to see if you should request a stronger vaccine, and if so, which product.

In summary, if ever there was a year to be sure to get the flu vaccine, this is the year. Take charge of your health and that of your family.