

# Best Practice Guidance for Overcoming Flu Vaccine Hesitancy



Use this guide to help address objections you may hear from patients hesitant to receive an annual flu vaccine.

**“I heard the flu shot doesn’t work well to protect against the flu.”**

While **vaccine effectiveness can vary each flu season**, recent studies show that **flu shots have helped prevent about 1.4-7.5 million flu illnesses, 39,000-100,000 flu-related hospitalizations, and 2,800-12,000 flu-related deaths every year in the US.**<sup>1</sup> The flu can be unpredictable, so it is critical you get an annual flu vaccine to reduce your risk.<sup>2</sup>

**“I know someone who got a flu shot and it didn’t work. They still got the flu.”**

It is possible to get the flu after receiving a flu shot because the flu vaccine is not always a perfect match to the circulating flu viruses, as the viruses continually change. However, **flu vaccination has been shown to reduce the severity of illness** in those who get sick, including decreasing the numbers of flu-related hospitalizations and deaths.<sup>2</sup>

**“I previously got a flu shot and it gave me the flu.”**

**The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu.** Flu shots are made with killed (inactivated), incomplete (recombinant), or weakened (attenuated) viruses that cannot cause infection. It is possible that some people may not feel well after getting a flu shot, but that may be due to other reasons such as mild side effects.<sup>2</sup>

**“I am healthy. I do not see the need to get a flu shot.”**

Healthy people can get the flu. **The CDC recommends all eligible persons over the age of 6 months get an annual flu vaccine.** The flu shot is the best way to protect yourself and others from the flu and severe outcomes of flu such as hospitalization or death.<sup>2,3</sup>

**“I’ve had a flu shot before, I don’t need another one.”**

It’s important to get vaccinated yearly because **viruses that cause the flu change every year and immune protection from vaccination declines over time.**<sup>2</sup> The CDC recommends all eligible persons over the age of 6 months get an annual flu vaccine.<sup>2</sup>

**“I’m worried about the side effects of the flu vaccine.”**

While side effects from the flu vaccine may occur, **they are usually mild and short lasting**, especially compared to the flu.<sup>2</sup>

\*CDC estimates from US 2010-2011 through 2019-2020 influenza seasons.



**“It’s already winter and I haven’t had the flu. I don’t need a flu shot at this point.”**

Ideally **everyone should be vaccinated by the end of October**, before flu infection starts increasing in the community. Even if you are not able to get vaccinated until November or later, the CDC still recommends getting your flu vaccination because flu activity most commonly peaks through February and can continue into May.<sup>2,4</sup>

**“Flu cases have been down so why do I need a flu shot?”**

Flu activity and infections were actually up during the 2022-2023 influenza season—marked by the early spread of influenza and compounded by lower-than-usual vaccination rates.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, it’s estimated that the 2022-2023 flu season will have produced 26-50 million flu illnesses, 290,000-620,000 flu-related hospitalizations, and 18,000-55,000 flu-related deaths from October 1, 2022 to March 11, 2023. That compares to last season’s relatively low numbers of 9 million illnesses, 100,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths.<sup>6</sup>

**“I received my COVID-19 vaccine, so I’m protected against the flu.”**

COVID-19 vaccines do not protect against flu. While symptoms for flu and COVID-19 can be similar, they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 vaccines are the best protection against COVID-19, and **a flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others from the flu.**<sup>7</sup>

**Visit [flu360.com](https://www.flu360.com) for more patient resources and support for your flu vaccination campaign.**

**“I would prefer to get my COVID-19 vaccine today, not my flu shot.”**

COVID-19 and flu vaccines can be safely given at the same time to eligible patients.<sup>7,8</sup>

**“I do not feel comfortable getting my flu shot and my COVID-19 shot at the same time.”**

COVID-19 and flu vaccines can be safely given at the same time to eligible patients. **COVID-19 vaccines are the best protection against COVID-19, and a flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others from the flu and its complications.**<sup>7,8</sup>

**Note:** If patient is still not comfortable getting both vaccines at the same time, before they leave the appointment, schedule them to come back for their flu vaccine, ideally before the end of October.

## Quick Tips for Discussing Flu Vaccines<sup>9</sup>

- **Recommend a flu shot at each clinical visit, including telehealth**
- **Keep messaging simple** - “a flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others from the flu and severe outcomes of flu”
- **Take a presumptive approach** - “we’ll be providing your annual flu shot today”
- **Communicate why an annual flu shot is important** - “flu vaccination helps prevent flu and severe outcomes of flu such as hospitalization or death”
- **Communicate the variable nature of the flu each season** - “the flu can be unpredictable, but vaccination is the best way to reduce your risk of flu illness and severe outcomes of flu”

**References:** **1.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Past seasons estimated influenza disease burden averted by vaccination. Accessed March 28, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/vaccines-work/past-burden-averted-est.html> **2.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key facts about seasonal flu vaccine. Accessed March 28, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/keyfacts.htm> **3.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy habits to help prevent flu. Accessed March 28, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/actions-prevent-flu.htm> **4.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Flu season. Accessed March 29, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season.htm> **5.** McLean HQ, Petrie JG, Hanson KE, et al. Interim estimates of 2022-23 seasonal influenza vaccine effectiveness — Wisconsin, October 2022–February 2023. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2023;72(8):201-205. doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm7208a1 **6.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022-2023 U.S. flu season: preliminary in-season burden estimates. Accessed March 28, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/preliminary-in-season-estimates.htm> **7.** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Frequently asked influenza (flu) questions: 2022-2023 season. March 28, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2022-2023.htm> **8.** Grohskopf LA, Blanton LH, Ferdinands JM, et al. Prevention and control of seasonal influenza with vaccines: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices — United States, 2022-23 influenza season. *MMWR Recomm Rep.* 2022;71(1):1-28. **9.** Immunize.org. Communicating the benefits of influenza vaccine during COVID-19. Accessed March 28, 2023. <https://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p3115.pdf>