THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTING INFLUENZA AND COVID-19

As SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, continues to circulate, it is more important than ever that older adults get vaccinated against both COVID-19 and influenza.

UNDERSTANDING COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON OLDER ADULTS

In 2019, a new coronavirus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), emerged that had not previously been seen in humans. In February 2020, the World Health Organization announced an official name for the disease caused by infection with SARS-CoV-2: coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19.[1]

Though everyone is at risk for getting COVID-19 if they are exposed to the virus, older adults are at increased risk of severe illness, including hospitalization and death, especially if they are not up to date on COVID-19 vaccination.[2]

7.5 out of every **10 deaths** are in people aged 65 years and older per CDC surveillance data.[3]

Studies also suggest coinfection wih influenza and COVID-19 disease can elevate risk of death and increase the chance of a poorer prognosis.[4,5]

FLU VACCINATION AMIDST COVID-19 FOR ADULTS AGED 65 AND OLDER

Your patients may have questions about flu and flu vaccination as it relates to COVID-19. Following are a series of questions your older adult patients may ask, with suggested evidence-based responses to help guide your discussion with them on the continued importance of flu vaccination during this time.

How do I know if I have the flu, or if it's COVID-19?

Flu and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses that share many characteristics, but they are caused by different viruses. Because some of the symptoms are similar, it can be hard to tell the difference between the two diseases. Testing for COVID-19 or influenza can help confirm a diagnosis.[6]

Which is more serious – flu or COVID-19?

While the risk of hospitalization or death among older adults is higher with COVID-19, both diseases are typically more severe in older adults as compared to younger adults, and can be life-threatening.[6] Additionally, people over the age of 65 tend to have several of the high-risk conditions, such as heart disease and chronic respiratory illness, that increase the severity of both flu and COVID-19. Both illnesses can lead to hospitalization, admission to an intensive care unit, intubation with mechanical ventilation, or death.[7] Vaccination against both illnesses is important.

? SHOULD I GET A FLU SHOT AND COVID-19 VACCINE?

Absolutely! In fact, it is HIGHLY recommended to get both. Vaccination against both viruses is important not only to help decrease your risk of severe illness and hospitalization if you do contract flu or COVID-19 but also to help protect those around you. Vaccination can reduce the need for medical care that may strain the healthcare system. You may get the COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time. Please talk to your provider.[8]

EVIDENCE-BASED RESOURCES

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- Similarities and Differences Between Flu and COVID-19
- Guidance for Planning Vaccination Clinics Held at Satellite, Temporary, or Off-Site Locations
- Vaccination Recommendations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

From the Immunization Action Coalition

- Ask the Experts: COVID-19 and Routine Vaccination
- Clinic Tools: Vaccination and COVID-19
- Repository of Resources for Maintaining Immunization During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Is it possible to catch the flu and COVID-19 at the same time?

Yes. Because these illnesses are caused by two different viruses, it is possible to contract flu and COVID-19 at the same time.[4,5,7]

Will the flu shot still help protect me against influenza?

Yes! Similar to the COVID-19 vaccines, influenza vaccines will prevent infection and are most effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death from flu. Getting your flu shot this year is important, not only to reduce your risk from flu, but also to help conserve healthcare resources. When getting your flu shot, remember to practice everyday preventive actions, such as wearing a mask to your appointment, if recommended by public health or your healthcare provider.[7]

I was just diagnosed with COVID-19, when can I get a flu shot?

If you know (or think) you have COVID-19, you want to avoid infecting anyone else while you are contagious. Follow CDC's recommendations to avoid spreading COVID-19 to others. Once your isolation period is over, you may get your flu shot without further delay. Talk to your provider if you have questions about when to get your flu vaccine.[9]

If I get a flu shot, will I be protected against COVID-19?

No. Because they are two different viruses, getting a flu shot will not protect you against COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccination is needed to protect you from COVID-19. Influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations can be given at the same or at different visits.[7]

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