

## What to Expect for the 2022-23 Flu Season

*This WorkCare Fact sheet discusses the 2022-23 influenza season, flu vaccine and workplace infectious disease prevention.*

When fall rolls around, employers encourage or may require employees to get their annual flu shot. They also advise employees to take other precautions to help prevent the spread of influenza, a contagious respiratory illness.

The flu is annually associated with local outbreaks and disruptive work and school absences. Influenza activity in the past two seasons was lower than average because COVID-19 prevention measures helped reduce exposures to all types of contagious illnesses. The peak percentage of positive influenza test results from clinical laboratories was the lowest in at least 25 years, according to public health reports.

However, it may be a different story this season. Case rates were up during the southern hemisphere winter flu season, and with COVID restrictions relaxed in the U.S., there is a higher likelihood of exposure to flu viruses. Influenza tends to spread more easily in the winter when conditions are dry and cold, people spend more time indoors and their immune systems respond to environmental changes such as lack of exposure to sunlight.

### Vaccination

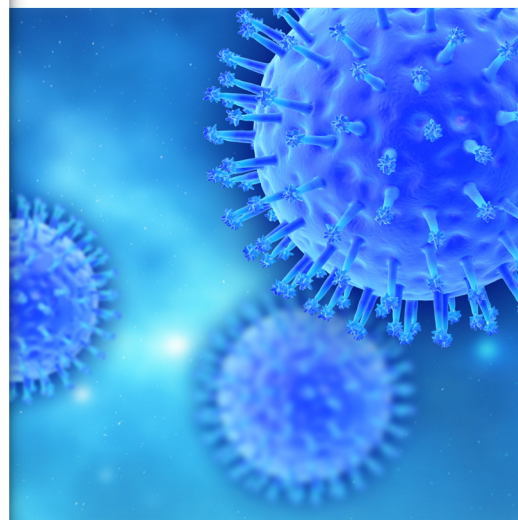
Annual vaccination is recommended for children starting at 6 months old and all adults, including pregnant women, unless they have a condition that precludes it. **It is safe to get a flu shot and a COVID-19 vaccine (first shots or boosters) at the same time.**

Vaccination helps prevent the spread of illness to family members, co-workers and vulnerable populations such as the elderly, infants and people with medical conditions who have a higher risk of serious complications such as pneumonia. The more people who get vaccinated, the greater the protection afforded to everyone.

Vaccine composition is based on strains that predominate during alternating flu seasons in the northern and southern hemisphere, as well as research on emerging strains. All flu vaccines for the 2022-23 season are quadrivalent vaccines that protect against two influenza A viruses and two influenza B viruses. Some vaccines are not recommended for some groups of people.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), available flu vaccines include:

1. [Standard-dose flu shots](#) manufactured using virus grown in eggs. Brands include Afluria, Fluarix, FluLaval and Fluzone. Afluria can be given either with a shot (6 months and older) or with a jet injector (18-64 years old).



2. An egg-free, [cell-based flu shot](#) (Flucelvax) containing virus grown in cell culture approved for people 6 months and older.
3. An egg-free [recombinant flu shot](#) (Flublok) made using recombinant technology approved for use in people 18 years and older. It is made without flu viruses and contains three times the antigen (which helps the body build immunity) than other standard-dose inactivated flu vaccines to help create a stronger immune response.
4. An egg-based [high dose flu shot](#) (Fluzone High-Dose) approved for use in people 65 years and older. This vaccine contains four times the antigen to help create a stronger immune response in people as they age.
5. An egg-based [adjuvanted flu shot](#) (Fluad) approved for people 65 years and older. An adjuvant is an ingredient that helps create a stronger immune response.
6. An egg-based [live attenuated flu nasal spray vaccine](#) (FluMist) made with attenuated (weakened) live flu viruses approved for use in people 2 to 49 years old. This vaccine is not recommended for use in pregnant women, immunocompromised people or those with certain medical conditions.

Private flu vaccine manufacturers project they will supply the U.S. with 173.5-183.5 million doses of vaccine this season. Most will be thimerosal-free or thimerosal-reduced vaccine (93 percent); about 20 percent of flu vaccines will be egg-free, the CDC reports. [Thimerosal](#) is a mercury-based preservative added in small amounts to multi-dose vials of medicines and vaccines.

## Symptoms and Treatment

Most people who get the flu have mild-to-moderate illness and recover on their own, but influenza can cause serious complications and death in vulnerable populations.

Symptoms may include fever/chills, cough, shortness of breath, runny nose or congestion, achiness, headache and fatigue. Some people, especially children, may have vomiting and diarrhea. This season, it's advisable to get tested for COVID-19 to rule it out because many, but not all, symptoms are similar to the flu. (Refer to Table 1 on Page 4.)

Flu remedies include rest, staying hydrated and eating nourishing foods. Over-the-counter medications are available to help relieve symptoms. Antiviral drugs may be prescribed in certain cases to treat symptoms and shorten illness duration. Studies show that antiviral drugs work best for treatment when started within two days of getting sick, although starting them later can still be helpful. Flu antiviral drugs are not used to treat COVID-19.

Most people who get the flu recover within five days to two weeks. Some people may develop sinus and ear infections, and in serious cases, pneumonia, inflammation of the heart, brain or muscles, or organ failure.

## Which Strains Does Flu Vaccine Target?

The [composition of flu vaccine](#) has been updated for the 2022-23 season. Vaccine selected by the Food and Drug Administration's Vaccines and Related Biologic Products Advisory Committee targets strains active during the southern hemisphere flu season and follows recommendations from the World Health Organization:

- No changes were made to the A(H1N1)pdm09 or B/Yamagata egg-based, cell-based or recombinant vaccine recommended components.
- The recommended A(H3N2) component was changed to an A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus for egg-based vaccines and an A/Darwin/6/2021 (H3N2)-like virus for cell-based or recombinant vaccines.
- The B/Victoria component recommendation was changed to a B/Austria/1359417/2021-like virus.
- The clade and subclade for the recommended vaccine strains were 6b.1A.5a.2 for A(H1N1)pdm09, 3C.2a1b.2a.2 for A(H3N2), V1A.3a.2 for B/Victoria and Y3 for B/Yamagata.

## More About Prevention

Along with vaccination, other flu prevention measures employers can recommend to employees include:

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water
- Using hand sanitizer when water is not available
- Covering coughs and sneezes and throwing tissues away
- Disinfecting shared objects and communal areas
- Not touching one's nose, mouth and eyes
- Staying home when ill and avoiding others who are sick
- If ill, wearing a mask when in public places

Employers may consider promoting flu prevention in the workplace with:

- [Posters and flyers](#)
- Communications from leadership
- Onsite health fairs
- Social media channels
- Vaccination during work hours
- Referrals to [local flu shot providers](#)

Employers have the right to establish health and safety rules that are job-related and consistent with business necessity. This includes requiring immunizations that protect against the spread of infectious illnesses. Employers who require flu vaccinations are expected to engage in an interactive process to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including exemptions for medical necessity or religious beliefs.

State laws require health care facilities to ensure consenting employees receive influenza vaccines. For specific state guidelines, refer to [Vaccination Laws](#). In some workplaces, infectious disease management includes mandatory use of personal protective equipment such as gloves, gown, mask, eye protection, face shield and safe injection practices. Surgical masks or respirators may be used to help reduce the spread of disease via airborne or droplet contamination.

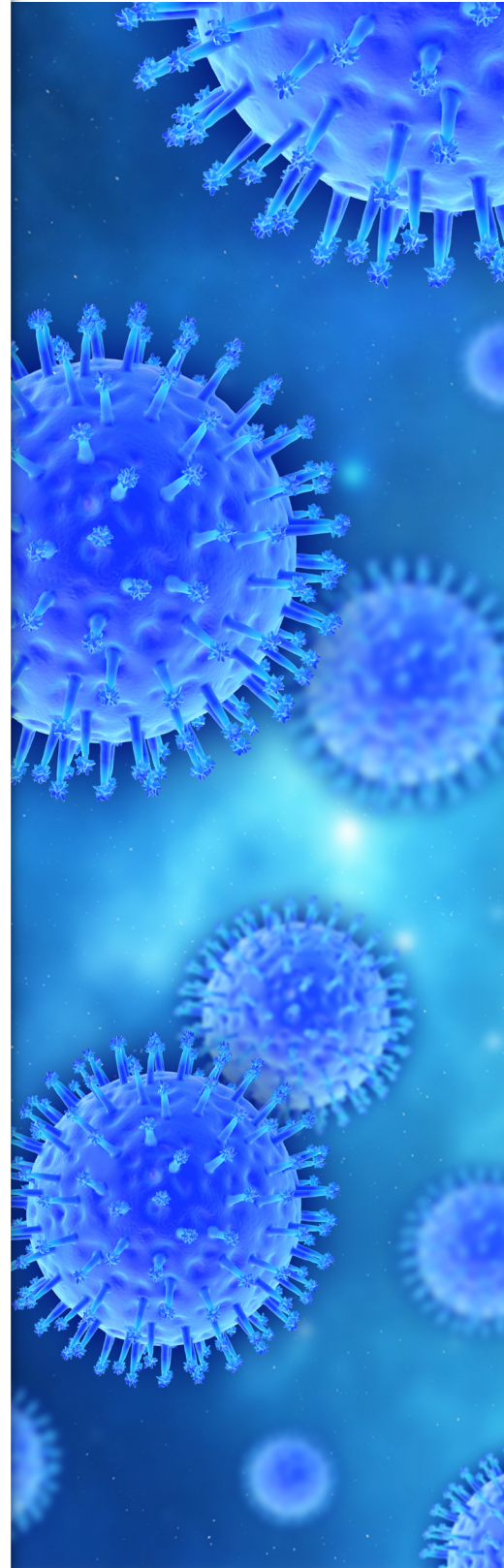


Table 1: COVID-19 and Flu Symptom Comparison

COVID-19 symptoms	Flu symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever or chills</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Muscle or body aches</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• New loss of taste or smell</li> <li>• Sore throat</li> <li>• Congestion or runny nose</li> <li>• Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• Diarrhea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever* or feeling feverish/chills</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Sore throat</li> <li>• Runny or stuffy nose</li> <li>• Muscle or body aches</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea; more common in children than adults.</li> </ul> <p>*Not everyone with flu will have a fever.</p>

Related Resources

- [CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#)
- [FluView weekly U.S. influenza surveillance reports](#)
- [Partnering for Vaccine Equity](#)
- [World Health Organization seasonal influenza](#)



WorkCare provides annual flu shots to employees in collaboration with [Total Wellness](#). Please write to [info@workcare.com](mailto:info@workcare.com) to learn more.

