

**Joint Statement Urging North Carolinians to Get Influenza Vaccinations  
to Protect Themselves when Flu Season Arrives as the  
COVID-19 Pandemic Remains a Public Health Threat**



*The following joint statement is endorsed by these organizations: AARP North Carolina, Association for Home & Hospice Care of North Carolina, Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation, Mutual Drug/CPSN, North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, North Carolina Alliance of Public Health Agencies, North Carolina Alliance of YMCAs, North Carolina Association of Educators, North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics, North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors, NC Chamber, North Carolina Coalition on Aging, North Carolina College of Emergency Physicians, North Carolina Community Health Center Association, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina Healthcare Association, North Carolina Health Care Facilities Association, North Carolina Medical Society, North Carolina Nurses Association, NC PACE Association, North Carolina Pediatric Society, North Carolina Public Health Association, Transitions LifeCare, YMCA of the Triangle*

As North Carolina prepares for the coming flu season, organizations representing healthcare providers, hospitals, business owners, educators, and senior citizens — as well as community stakeholders — have joined together to issue this statement to promote the importance of getting a flu shot during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination against the flu for everyone 6 months and older with any licensed, age-appropriate flu vaccine. Vaccination is the best way to prevent infection with the flu.

This year, it is more important than ever to get a flu vaccination, considering the continued presence of the COVID-19 viral global pandemic that has already claimed more than 205,000 American lives. Widespread flu and COVID-19 at the same time could overwhelm our health care system, making it hard for people to get medical care they may need.

Millions of Americans get the flu each year. It is estimated that at least 39 million people became sick due to flu-related illness during the 2019-20 flu season, leading to more than 18 million medical visits, 410,000 hospitalizations, and at least 24,000 deaths. Vaccination has been shown to reduce the risk of flu-related illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths.

In addition to the human cost, the economic impact of the flu amounts to billions of dollars annually in lost work time and productivity, and increased health care costs. Getting a flu shot is important to reduce strain on the economy and the health care delivery system during the continued fight against COVID-19.

For those who get the flu, vaccination can also make illness milder, making is especially important for those at higher risk of more serious outcomes. This includes people over 65 years of age, children younger than 5, pregnant women and those with certain medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and obesity. In addition, we are learning that people can have the flu and COVID-19 at the same time, making it even more important to lower the risk of serious illness with the flu.

While data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that the percent of Americans getting flu vaccines has risen in recent years, many people still do not get vaccinated. During the 2018-19 flu season, CDC data shows just 45.3 percent of U.S. adults (ages 18 and older) and 62.6 percent of children (ages 6 months to 17 years) received the vaccine.

Getting a flu shot is especially important for people in communities with health disparities that have also been hit hard by COVID-19. It will be critical to promote and support flu vaccine initiatives serving these communities. The flu shot is low- or no-cost for many North Carolinians with commercial insurance. As always, all vaccines including influenza are fully covered by Medicaid and Medicare. Local health departments, community health centers and free clinics also offer no-cost flu shots to uninsured patients based on availability. So please, get a flu shot and encourage your family, friends and neighbors to do the same.

As the school year resumes and flu season approaches, now is the time to get a flu vaccine. Doing so is an important precaution that provides a measure of relief to those who are vaccinated – it is one less thing to worry about during the time of COVID-19.

In addition to getting a flu vaccine, parents should check with their healthcare provider about getting their children caught up on any vaccinations they might have missed during the temporary stay-at-home order earlier this year.

We urge all North Carolinians to practice the following essential precautions to protect against the spread of flu, COVID-19, and other viruses:

- Practice the 3 Ws.
  - Wear a cloth mask over your nose and mouth when in public spaces.
  - Wait 6 feet apart and avoid close contact with people outside your household.
  - Wash hands frequently with soap and water and use an approved hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent ethyl alcohol content.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then discard the tissue promptly.
- Contact your doctor if you are sick or have a fever, for advice on treatment and stay home until you have been cleared by your doctor.

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