



ANNUAL FLU VACCINATIONS: VITAL TO PUBLIC HEALTH

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW SERIES: 2021 PUBLIC HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

Introduction

CDC estimates that the 2019 – 2020 flu season resulted in up to 38 million illnesses, 405,000 hospitalizations, and 22,000 deaths. This is approximately five million fewer flu illnesses than in the 2018 – 2019 season, a decline possibly associated with COVID-19 mitigation measures, reduced flu testing, and lower numbers of people seeking treatment during the pandemic. However, the 2019 – 2020 flu season had higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death for children under five and adults under 50 than in recent seasons.¹

Children under the age of five and adults aged 65 years and older are always among the most vulnerable to serious illness or death from the flu. For the 2019 – 2020 flu season, CDC estimates that the total number of flu deaths for children under five was 254 and for adults aged 65 years and older deaths totaled 13,673.¹

Despite this rise in deaths, more individuals under five and over 64 received the flu vaccine during the 2019-2020 flu season than in the year prior.² In fact, CDC estimates that the flu vaccine prevented 7.5 million additional flu illnesses—and further potential deaths—during the 2019–2020 season.² Although effectiveness varies, recent studies show that vaccination reduces the risk of flu by 40–60%, and CDC recommends that everyone six months and older receive the annual flu shot.³

BY THE NUMBERS

2019 – 2020 Flu Season^{1,2,4}

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Age: 0-4

254 Deaths

2,875,424 Medical visits

29,920 Hospitalizations

VACCINATION RATES

2020 national estimate **75.5%**

Range among states
60.1% to 90%

Healthy People 2030 target:
70%

IMPACT ON OLDER ADULTS

Age 65 and older

13,673 Deaths

1,089,850 Medical visits

176,924 Hospitalizations

VACCINATION RATES

2020 national estimate **69.8%**

Range among states
54.4% to 78.9%

Healthy People 2030 target:
70%

Legislative Trends

CHILD CARE FACILITIES

In 2020, Virginia became eighth state to require flu shots for children six months and older who are enrolled in child care facilities. Alternatively, nine states have enacted laws requiring day care centers, nurseries, and preschools to provide information about the flu and flu vaccine to parents and caregivers annually, typically in late summer or early fall. However, content varies among states. Kansas and Tennessee require information about the benefits of the flu vaccine, while other states, such as Florida and Massachusetts, require disseminating information about flu causes, symptoms, and transmission. Louisiana and Mississippi go a step further and require that the materials include information about the availability and accessibility of the flu vaccine.

Most of these states direct their health agencies to develop or publish material for distribution to ensure the information is based on sound public health practices. While no studies have examined the impact of these requirements, CDC data indicates a general increase in flu vaccination rates among young children in these states.²

ADULT RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

Since 2015, 11 states have enacted laws requiring people in adult residential facilities—such as assisted living facilities, retirement communities, and nursing homes—to receive information about the flu and the flu vaccine. Some states have gone further than requiring education. For example, Michigan law requires that facilities assist residents in obtaining the flu vaccine, while Kentucky requires that all long-term care residents be immunized against the flu. State health agencies are often tasked to develop materials for adult residential facilities, as well.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO FLU VACCINES

In 2020, seven states enacted laws that expanded the list of qualified health professionals authorized to administer the flu vaccine. Ohio enacted a law that permits podiatrists to administer the flu vaccine. South Carolina now permits pharmacists to

administer flu vaccines to children under 12. Florida, Pennsylvania, and Vermont now permit pharmacists to administer flu vaccines without a standing order. West Virginia allows pharmacy interns to administer flu vaccines under the supervision of a licensed pharmacist, and Indiana now permits pharmacy technicians to administer flu vaccines.

Looking Ahead

ASTHO expects more states to adopt laws aimed at reducing the impact of flu among young children and older adults. In addition to requirements regarding education and information, foreseeable state legislative action includes new policies that would:

- **Allow pharmacists to administer flu vaccines to children.**
- **Require children attending child care facilities to receive annual flu vaccinations.**
- **Require employees of child care and adult residential facilities to receive annual flu vaccinations.**

1. CDC. "Estimated Influenza Illnesses, Medical visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths in the United States — 2019–2020 Influenza Season." Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/2019-2020.html>. Accessed 12-4-2020.
2. CDC. "2010-11 through 2019-20 Influenza Seasons Vaccination Coverage Trend Report." Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/reportshtml/trends/index.html>. Accessed 12-4-2020.
3. CDC. "Frequently Asked Influenza (Flu) Questions: 2019-2020 Season." Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2019-2020.htm>. Accessed 12-11-2020.
4. Healthy People 2030. "Increase the proportion of people who get the flu vaccine every year — IID-09." Available at <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/vaccination/increase-proportion-people-who-get-flu-vaccine-every-year-iid-09/data>. Accessed 12-11-2020.

EIGHT STATES

HAVE ENACTED LAWS THAT REQUIRE DAY CARE CENTERS, NURSERIES, AND PRESCHOOL ENROLEES SIX MONTHS AND OLDER TO BE VACCINATED AGAINST THE FLU.




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