



# Protect Your Patients This Flu Season

Pharmacist Guide and Talking Points

**FIGHT FLU**



## Role of Pharmacists in Flu Vaccination

Pharmacists play a critical role in protecting patients against seasonal influenza and influenza-related complications by advocating for and administering influenza vaccines and by providing influenza antiviral medications in accordance with CDC’s influenza antiviral recommendations. While clinical practices have limited hours and typically require appointments, pharmacies often have longer hours, and many do not require appointments, offering another avenue for patients to get their annual influenza vaccines.

## CDC Flu Vaccine Recommendations

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that everyone 6 months and older receive an influenza vaccine every year.

**Vaccination against influenza is especially important for people at higher risk of developing influenza-related complications, including:**

- Children younger than 5 years old, especially younger than 2.
- Adults 65 years and older.
- Pregnant people and people up to two weeks postpartum.
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- American Indian or Alaska Native people.
- People who have certain medical conditions, including:
  - » Asthma.
  - » Neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions (including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle, such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy [seizure disorders], stroke, intellectual disability, moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury).
  - » Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis).
  - » Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure, and coronary artery disease).
  - » Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease).
  - » Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus).
  - » Kidney disorders.
  - » Liver disorders.
  - » Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders).
  - » Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people living with HIV or AIDS, cancer, or those on chronic steroids).
  - » Children and adolescents receiving aspirin or salicylate-containing medications.
  - » People with extreme obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or more).

## Types of Vaccines Available

For the current flu season, providers may choose to administer any licensed, age-appropriate flu vaccine — inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV4), recombinant influenza vaccine (RIV4), or live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV4). Specific flu vaccines in adults 65 and older over standard-dose flu vaccines, if available because they are potentially more effective in this age group:

VACCINE TYPE	VACCINE DESCRIPTION	RECOMMENDED FOR*
<b>Quadrivalent (4-component) Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (IIV4)</b>	Injectable inactivated vaccine containing the influenza A(H1N1), (H3N2) and two influenza B lineage viruses predicted to be most common.	People 6 months and older
<b>Quadrivalent Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV4)</b>	Intranasal live attenuated vaccine containing the influenza A(H1N1), (H3N2) and two influenza B lineage viruses predicted to be most common.	Healthy non-pregnant people 2 years through 49 years
<b>Quadrivalent Cell Culture-Based Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (ccIIV4)</b>	Injectable inactivated influenza vaccine manufactured using cell culture rather than eggs, containing the influenza A(H1N1), (H3N2) and two influenza B lineage viruses predicted to be most common.	People 6 months and older
<b>Quadrivalent Recombinant Influenza Vaccine (RIV4)</b>	Injectable influenza vaccine produced without the use of influenza viruses or eggs; Contains the influenza A(H1N1), (H3N2) and two influenza B lineage viruses predicted to be most common.	Adults 18 years and older
<b>Quadrivalent Adjuvanted Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (aIIV4)</b>	Injectable inactivated influenza vaccine containing MF59 adjuvant, designed to help promote a stronger immune response in older adults; Contains the influenza A(H1N1), (H3N2) and two influenza B viruses predicted to be most common.	Adults 65 years and older
<b>Quadrivalent High-Dose Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (HD-IIV4)</b>	Injectable inactivated influenza vaccine containing four times the antigen of a standard-dose flu vaccine, designed to help promote a stronger immune response in older adults; Contains the influenza A(H1N1), (H3N2) and influenza B viruses predicted to be most common.	Adults 65 years and older

\*Licensed ages vary for different brands; consult package insert for appropriate ages for specific vaccines.



For more information, [cdc.gov/flu/professionals](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO

## Egg Allergies

People with egg allergies can receive any licensed, recommended age-appropriate influenza vaccine and no longer have to be monitored for 30 minutes after receiving the vaccine. People who have severe egg allergies should be vaccinated in a medical setting and be supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions. Note that there are two types of egg-free seasonal flu vaccines: recombinant and cell-based.

## Strategies to Increase Influenza Vaccination Rates in Your Pharmacy

### Screen for Higher Risk Patients

- CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older receive an annual influenza vaccine. Pharmacists can help identify patients through incoming referrals and prescriptions for whom influenza vaccination is especially important, particularly patients at higher risk for developing influenza-related complications.
- If patients have not received their influenza vaccine, pharmacists have an opportunity to offer a flu vaccine on-site.

### Advocacy and Promotion

- Pharmacists can share newsletters, posters, brochures, and other promotional materials to highlight the risk of influenza and the importance of influenza vaccination.
- Pharmacists also can partner with local health departments and nonprofit advocacy groups to promote influenza vaccines among higher risk groups and the general public.

## Talking Points: How to Give a Strong Recommendation

### Apply the CDC SHARE Model

SHARE is a five-part approach that health care professionals can use to communicate with patients about the importance of influenza vaccines and to enable patients to make informed decisions:

	<p><b>SHARE</b> why an influenza vaccine is right for the patient given their age, health status, lifestyle, occupation, or other risk factors.</p>	<p><i>"This vaccine can protect you and your family from getting sick from flu. By getting the vaccine today, you'll be protecting yourself and the people around you, like your children and parents, who may be more vulnerable to serious flu illness."</i></p>
	<p><b>HIGHLIGHT</b> positive experiences with vaccines to reinforce the benefits and strengthen confidence in influenza vaccination.</p>	<p><i>"In addition to recommending a yearly flu vaccine to my patients, I get one each year to protect myself and my family from flu."</i></p>
	<p><b>ADDRESS</b> patient questions and any concerns about influenza vaccines, including side effects, safety, and vaccine effectiveness, in plain and understandable language. Acknowledge that while people who get an influenza vaccine may still get sick, there are studies to show that their illness may be less severe.</p>	<p><i>"A flu vaccine cannot cause flu infection. The most common side effects of an influenza vaccine are mild, like redness, swelling, soreness, or a low-grade fever for a flu shot. This should go away within a few days."</i></p> <p><i>"Flu vaccines protect against flu illness but aren't 100% effective, so even if you get vaccinated you might still become sick with flu. It's important to get your flu vaccine because studies show that even if you do get sick, vaccination may make your flu illness less severe."</i></p>
	<p><b>REMIND</b> patients that influenza vaccines help protect them and their loved ones from serious influenza illness and complications that can result in hospitalization or even death for some people.</p>	<p><i>"Flu activity is going to start to pick up, and CDC says to expect more cases in the coming months. That is why I want to make sure I help protect you and your loved ones against flu and its potentially serious complications."</i></p>
	<p><b>EXPLAIN</b> the potential costs of getting influenza, including potential serious health effects for the patient, time lost (such as missing work or family obligations), financial costs, and potentially spreading flu to more vulnerable family and friends.</p>	<p><i>"It's important to get vaccinated this season because flu vaccination can reduce potential flu illnesses, doctor visits, and missed work and school due to flu, and can protect those around you who are more vulnerable to potentially serious flu complications."</i></p>



For more information, [cdc.gov/flu/professionals](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals)  
or call **1-800-CDC-INFO**



## Address Patient Questions

When patients express hesitation about getting an influenza vaccine, take the opportunity to identify their concerns and address any questions or misconceptions they may have about influenza or influenza vaccination using the CDC SHARE Model.

## Some common patient questions can include:

### Do flu vaccines work?

- Flu vaccines are effective in reducing the risk of flu illness and its potentially serious complications, though their effectiveness varies each year.
- Recent flu vaccine effectiveness studies show that flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu illness by between 40% and 60% during seasons that flu vaccines are well matched to circulating viruses.
- Flu vaccination may make your illness milder if you do get sick with flu.
- Flu vaccination can reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalization, including among children, older adults, and others who are more vulnerable to serious flu complications.

### I've heard that some people get a flu vaccine and still get sick with flu.

- That's possible, but there are data to show that flu vaccine has been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization, and death by about half in those who get vaccinated but still become sick with flu.

### Can a flu vaccine give me the flu?

- No. There can be some side effects, which are usually mild, but this is not flu illness.

### Do I need a flu vaccine every year?

- CDC recommends a flu vaccine for everyone 6 months and older every year for two reasons:
  - » First, a person's immune protection from vaccination declines over time and therefore, an annual vaccine is needed for optimal protection.
  - » Second, because flu viruses are constantly changing, the formulation of the flu vaccine is reviewed each year and sometimes updated to keep up with changing flu viruses.

### Are any of the available influenza vaccines recommended over others?

- Three specific flu vaccines are preferentially recommended for people 65 years and older over other flu vaccines. People 65 and older should get a higher dose or adjuvanted flu vaccine, including:
  - » [Fluzone High Dose Quadrivalent Vaccine](#)
  - » [Flublock Quadrivalent Vaccine](#)
  - » [Fluad Quadrivalent Vaccine](#)
- These vaccines are preferred for people 65 years and older because a review of existing studies suggested that, in this age group, these vaccines are potentially more effective than standard dose unadjuvanted flu vaccines.

### What if a preferentially recommended flu vaccine is not available?

- If one of the three preferentially recommended flu vaccines for people 65 and older is not available at the time of administration, people in this age group should get a standard-dose flu vaccine instead.



For more information, [cdc.gov/flu/professionals](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals)  
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## Share Additional Information

If the conversation does not lead to an influenza vaccine administered that day, pharmacists can share the CDC patient flyer or another informational brochure that the patient can take home to review and consider for the future.

## CDC Antiviral Recommendations for Seasonal Flu

CDC recommends antiviral medications for treatment of influenza as an important adjunct to annual influenza vaccination. If a patient becomes sick with influenza, antiviral drugs may be a treatment option. Antiviral drugs can lessen symptoms and shorten the time patients are sick by 1 or 2 days and can prevent more serious influenza-related complications, like pneumonia and respiratory failure.

Antiviral treatment is recommended as early as possible, ideally within 48 hours of symptom onset, for any patient with confirmed or suspected influenza, who is hospitalized, has severe or progressive illness, or is at higher risk for influenza-related complications. Clinical judgment is based on a patient's disease severity and progression, age, underlying medical conditions, likelihood of influenza, and time of onset of symptoms.



**For more answers to common misconceptions, visit CDC's website.**

## References

- **ASHP Guidelines on the Pharmacist's Role in Immunization**  
<https://www.ashp.org/-/media/assets/policy-guidelines/docs/guidelines/pharmacists-role-immunization.ashx?la=en&hash=84FB763202C4EFA6034EF80A2765401AE92B7B4D>
- **Make a Strong Flu Vaccine Recommendation**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/flu-vaccine-recommendation.htm>
- **Misconceptions about Seasonal Flu and Flu Vaccines**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/misconceptions.htm>
- **Vaccine Effectiveness**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/vaccineeffect.htm>
- **What are the benefits of flu vaccination?**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccine-benefits.htm>
- **Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/keyfacts.htm>
- **Influenza Antiviral Medications: Summary for Clinicians**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/summary-clinicians.htm>



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