

Did You Know?

As Viruses Change, Vaccines Are Updated to Protect You

CVEEP
Champions for
Vaccine Education,
Equity + Progress

Learn why flu and COVID-19 vaccines are updated periodically with answers to frequently asked questions.

Are flu and COVID-19 still a serious threat to public health?

Both flu and COVID-19 remain significant health threats, causing thousands of hospitalizations and deaths annually. From October 1, 2023 through June 1, 2024, there were estimated to have been at least 35 million flu illnesses, 390,000 hospitalizations, and 24,000 deaths.¹ In that same period, approximately 44,000 deaths were attributed to COVID-19 in the United States.²

Do viruses like flu and COVID-19 change over time?

Flu and COVID-19 viruses change through a process called mutation. These mutations help the viruses avoid our natural immune responses and the protection provided by vaccines. By mutating, flu and COVID-19 viruses can move more easily from person to person and reproduce faster, ensuring their survival.

How do these changes influence vaccine development and updates?

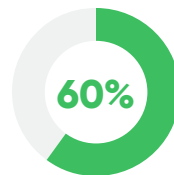
Because viruses mutate, the vaccines designed to protect against them must be updated regularly. For example, the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes COVID-19, has produced many variants since the pandemic began. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are specifically formulated to address these mutations, providing protection against the variants that are most likely to circulate.

Why do flu and COVID-19 vaccines need to be updated more frequently than other vaccines?

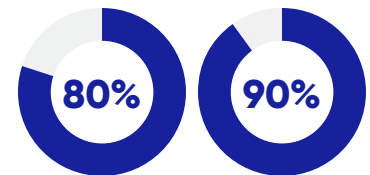
Flu and COVID-19 viruses mutate frequently, leading to many variants that can evade existing immunity. This requires regular updates to their vaccines. In contrast, viruses like polio and measles do not mutate as often, allowing their vaccines to provide longer-lasting protection without needing frequent updates.

What are the benefits of staying up to date with flu and COVID-19 vaccinations?

Staying current with flu and COVID-19 vaccines significantly reduces the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death. For instance:



Flu vaccines
reduce the risk of illness from flu by up to 60%.³



COVID-19 vaccines
decrease the risk of hospitalization by 80% and death by 90%.

These vaccines are particularly important for high-risk groups, including older adults and individuals with compromised immune systems.^{4,5}

Stay protected. Stay informed. Get vaccinated.

Regular updates to flu and COVID-19 vaccines are essential for maintaining protection against these constantly evolving viruses. Staying up to date with recommended vaccinations is the best way to reduce your risk of severe illness and help protect your family, friends and community.

¹<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/preliminary-in-season-estimates.htm>

²<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm>

³<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/vaccines-work/vaccineeffect.htm>

⁴<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7037e3.htm>

⁵<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7112e1.htm>

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