

# Frequently Asked Questions About Respiratory Disease Season

## Q. What respiratory viruses spread in the fall and winter and what can I do to help protect myself from infection?

**A.** There are several vaccine-preventable respiratory viruses that circulate during the fall and winter seasons, including **COVID-19, influenza (flu), and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)**. Respiratory viruses spread more easily in the winter for a variety of reasons. Environmental conditions allow viruses to spread at an increased rate, especially as the winter months bring drier conditions and colder temperatures, helping viruses to survive longer in the air and travel further distances. Dry and cold air can also interfere with the body's defense mechanisms against viruses, and during the winter, people tend to spend extended periods indoors, which also helps viruses spread more easily from person to person.

Whether it is COVID-19, flu, or RSV, infectious respiratory diseases can cause severe and sometimes life-threatening illness, especially for populations with certain risk factors, including those with chronic illness, older adults, young children, and pregnant people.

Staying up to date with recommended vaccines is the best way to help protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community from infectious respiratory disease.<sup>1</sup>

## Q. What vaccines do I need this fall and winter to ensure I'm staying up to date and best protecting myself against severe respiratory illness?

**A.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends **everyone ages 6 months and older** receive updated **COVID-19** and **flu vaccines** this fall to help protect against severe respiratory illness.<sup>2</sup>

For RSV vaccines<sup>3</sup>:

- The CDC recommends **adults 75 and older** receive a single dose of the RSV vaccine.
- The CDC recommends **adults 60-74 years who are at increased risk for severe RSV** receive a single dose of RSV vaccine. This

includes individuals with certain chronic medical conditions, those with moderate or severe immune compromise, and persons living in nursing homes, among other risk factors.

- The CDC also recommends that **pregnant people** receive an RSV vaccine between **32-36 weeks of pregnancy** to protect their infants after birth. For mothers who did not receive an RSV vaccine during pregnancy, the CDC recommends giving a preventive monoclonal antibody to newborns after birth.

## Q. When were the COVID-19 and flu vaccines updated and how will these be different from those of previous years?

**A.** As the viruses that cause COVID-19 and flu spread, they change, resulting in many variants, or versions, of the virus that are different from its original form. These changes (also known as mutations) allow the viruses that cause COVID-19 and flu to avoid our natural immune response and the protection provided by previous vaccines. In response, COVID-19 and flu vaccines are updated regularly to provide protection against these changing viruses. Updated 2024-2025 COVID-19 and flu vaccines were approved by the Food and Drug Administration in August 2024 and recommended by the CDC ahead of the 2024-2025 respiratory illness season.

The RSV vaccine is not currently an annual vaccine, meaning eligible individuals do not need to get a dose every RSV season.<sup>4</sup> The CDC continues to monitor the disease and the RSV vaccine and updates recommendations as needed.

## Q. Can I get my COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines during the same appointment?

**A.** Yes, COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines may be given at the same visit, according to CDC. This is known as coadministration and is a common way to stay up to date on recommended vaccines—particularly when there may not be an opportunity in the future to receive these vaccines.<sup>5</sup>

**Q. If I have already had COVID-19 or the flu this year, do I still need to get vaccinated?**

**A.** Yes. Both COVID-19 and flu still result in thousands of hospitalizations and deaths each year and the best way to reduce the risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and flu is to stay up to date with recommended vaccines. The vaccines targeting COVID-19 and flu are updated regularly to specifically address and provide protection against new variants that are expected to circulate during the upcoming respiratory disease season. Therefore, even if you have been previously infected with COVID-19 or the flu, it is important to receive the latest COVID-19 and flu vaccines to ensure you're up to date and protected.

This past summer saw a surge in COVID-19 cases. If you recently had COVID-19, you may consider delaying your next vaccine dose by three months from when symptoms started, or, if asymptomatic, three months from when you first received a positive test.<sup>6</sup>

**Q. Are RSV vaccines and the updated COVID-19 and flu vaccines covered free of cost?**

**A.** Nearly all private and public health insurance plans cover vaccines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)—which includes vaccines against COVID-19, flu, and RSV—free of cost to you. Adults without insurance may be able to access vaccines free of cost through patient assistance programs offered by vaccine manufacturers or from a state or local health department. The Bridge Access Program, which provided free COVID-19 vaccines to adults without health insurance, ended in August 2024.

All private and public insurance plans cover vaccines recommended by ACIP for children free of cost. The CDC's Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children who are uninsured or underinsured, as well as American Indian and Alaska Native children.<sup>7</sup> A child may also receive a vaccine through the VFC program if

they are covered by Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Children who are uninsured or children who otherwise might not be vaccinated because of inability to pay can access vaccines free of cost by visiting a provider enrolled in the VFC program or through a public health clinic, a federally qualified health center (FQHC), or a rural health clinic.

**Q. My child and I visited a provider enrolled in the VFC Program and they mentioned an administration fee. Do I need to pay this?**

**A.** Although there is no charge for VFC Program vaccines, healthcare providers can charge what is called an "administration fee".<sup>8</sup> This fee is like a co-pay and the price can differ between providers and between states. However, it is important to note that healthcare providers **cannot refuse** to vaccinate your child if you are unable to pay the vaccine administration fee.

**Q. Where can I get COVID-19, flu and RSV vaccines?**

**A. Healthcare Provider's Office:** If you have a primary healthcare provider, you can schedule an appointment to discuss staying up to date with your COVID-19 and flu vaccines—and get vaccinated.

**Pharmacies:** Most major pharmacies offer many recommended vaccines for adults. Check with your pharmacy to see what vaccines they stock and if you need to make a vaccination appointment. [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) features a pharmacy lookup tool to help you find a pharmacy near you.

**State and Local Health Departments:** State and local health departments are a great resource for learning where you can get COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines. Additionally, some health departments may offer free or low-cost vaccines for those who are uninsured, as well as information about vaccine recommendations and eligibility.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncird/whats-new/covid-19-can-surge-throughout-the-year.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/s-t0627-vaccine-recommendations.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rsv/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/s-0626-vaccination-adults.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncird/whats-new/getting-vaccines-at-same-time.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/hcp/tools-resources/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-for-children/vfc-information-for-parents/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-for-children/vfc-information-for-parents/index.html>