

2023-24 Flu Season

Frequently Asked Questions

Flu Season Vaccine Information

1. When does flu season normally begin and end, and when is it expected to peak?

The timing of flu is difficult to predict and can vary in different parts of the country and from season to season. In our area, though, most flu activity peaks in December and January.

2. What viruses will the 2023-24 flu vaccine protect against?

For 2023-24, recommendations are for egg-based, cell-based, and recombinant flu vaccines as listed below (all are quadrivalent vaccines designed to protect against four-flu virus):

Egg-based vaccine composition recommendations:

- an A/Victoria/4897/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
- an A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021-like virus (B/Victoria lineage)
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata lineage)

Cell- or recombinant-based vaccine composition recommendations:

- an A/Wisconsin/67/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
- an A/Darwin/6/2021 (H3N2)-like virus
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021-like virus (B/Victoria lineage)
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata lineage)

Vaccine strains for the 2023-24 influenza vaccines were selected by the Food and Drug Administration's Vaccines and Related Biologic Products Advisory Committee based on the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended Northern Hemisphere 2023-24 influenza vaccine composition.

The composition of the 2023-24 U.S. seasonal influenza vaccines includes an update to the influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 component. For the 2023-24 season, U.S.-licensed influenza vaccines will contain hemagglutinin (HA) derived from 1) an influenza A/Victoria/4897/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus (for egg-based vaccines) or an influenza A/Wisconsin/67/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus (for cell culture-based and recombinant vaccines); 2) an influenza A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus (for egg-based vaccines) or an influenza A/Darwin/6/2021 (H3N2)-like virus (for cell culture-based and recombinant vaccines); 3) an influenza B/Austria/1359417/2021 (Victoria lineage)-like virus; and 4) an influenza B/Phuket/3073/2013 (Yamagata lineage)-like virus.



Recommendations for the composition of Northern Hemisphere influenza vaccines are made by the World Health Organization (WHO), which organizes a consultation, usually in February of each year, surveillance data is reviewed, and candidate vaccine viruses are discussed. Information about the WHO meeting of February 2023 for selection of the 2023-24 Northern Hemisphere influenza vaccine composition. (Sources: **Prevention and Control of Seasonal Influenza with Vaccines: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices – United States, 2023-24 Influenza Season.**)

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies that provide protection against Influenza virus infection develop in the body.

3. I have history of an egg allergy; can I receive the flu vaccine?

People with **egg allergy** may receive any vaccine (egg-based or non-egg-based) that is otherwise appropriate for their age and health status. Experts no longer recommended additional safety measures for people allergic to eggs beyond those recommended for receipt of any vaccine, regardless of the severity of previous reaction to egg.

For additional questions, please consult with your health care provider or Employee Health at (832) 824-2150, option 5, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

4. Are there side effects of the flu vaccine?

Flu vaccines are safe. Serious problems from a flu vaccine are very rare. The most common side effect a person is likely to experience is soreness at the injection site. This is generally mild and usually goes away after a day or two. For more information, please visit **CDC's Influenza Vaccine Safety**.

5. What should I do if I feel sick after my vaccination?

Please notify your leader and call Employee Health Nurse Support line at 832-822-2463, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

6. Where can I find more information about this year's flu vaccine?

Please **click here** to view information provided by the CDC to frequently asked questions about the flu vaccine. Information is also available in Spanish; **click here** to view.

FLU AND COVID-19

1. What is Influenza (also called flu)?

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by Influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

2. How does the flu spread?

Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people infected with influenza. Sometimes, people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

3. What are symptoms of flu?

Symptoms of flu can include:

- fever
- chills
- fatigue
- headache
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- vomiting and diarrhea also can occur but are more common in children than adults

4. What are possible complications of being infected by the flu?

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes. Complications of the flu can be life threatening and can result in hospitalization or death.

5. What's the difference between the flu and COVID-19?

Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2) and flu is caused by infection with **influenza viruses**. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone but getting tested for either virus could help confirm a diagnosis. Flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, but there are some key differences between the two. For more details on the differences between flu and COVID-19, [click here](#).

6. Will a flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

No, getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19; however, flu vaccination has many other important benefits. Flu vaccines may prevent you from being infected by the flu virus or reduce the impact of flu illness on your health, potential hospitalization and death.

7. Can I get a flu vaccine if I have COVID-19 symptoms? Can I get a flu vaccine if I'm not feeling well?

No. People with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should defer vaccination regardless of whether they have symptoms until they have met the criteria to discontinue their isolation. While mild illness does not make a flu vaccination inadvisable, vaccination visits for these people should be postponed, to avoid exposing health care personnel, colleagues, patients and families to the virus that causes COVID-19. When scheduling or confirming appointments for vaccination, people should notify the provider's office or clinic in advance if they currently have or develop any symptoms of COVID-19.

8. Can I have flu and COVID-19 at the same time?

Although unusual, co-infection with the influenza and SARS-CoV-2 (i.e., COVID-19) virus can occur. Some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, making it hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Diagnostic testing for either virus can help determine if you are sick with flu or COVID-19.

9. Can I get a flu vaccine if I have tested positive for COVID-19?

Yes, but only if you have met the criteria for **discontinuing isolation**. Additionally, a prior infection with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or flu does not protect someone from future flu infections. The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated every year.

10. Can I get a flu vaccine if I have been exposed to COVID-19? What if another member of my household has COVID-19, can I get a flu vaccine?

If you have been exposed and advised to quarantine, you should only get a flu vaccine once you have met all criteria for either discontinuing home isolation or quarantine and remain without symptoms.

FLU PROGRAM AT TEXAS CHILDREN'S

1. Who is eligible to receive the flu vaccine at Texas Children's?

All Texas Children's employees, Baylor College of Medicine faculty and staff working at Texas Children's facilities, volunteers, as well as contract employees with a yellow Texas Children's badge are eligible to receive the flu vaccine at no cost at Texas Children's.

2. What are the options for getting my flu vaccine this year?

- **On-Site Events:** Available throughout various Texas Children's locations/times to provide you with convenient access to the flu shot. You can also schedule a one-on-one appointment with Employee Health at the Medical Center, West, The Woodlands and Austin campuses.

- **Texas Children's Pediatrics during your child's appointment:** If your child receives care through a TCP practice, you can receive your flu vaccine free of charge on site during your child's visit.
- **Primary Care Provider (PCP):** Texas Children's medical plans cover the flu vaccine at 100% (free) when administered at your PCP's office.
- **Retail Pharmacies:** The flu vaccine is available at no cost to you through Texas Children's medical plans when administered by an in-network pharmacy.
- **Local Grocers:** Grocers such as HEB, Randall's, Kroger and others often offer a convenient option for you to grab your flu shot at the pharmacy counter while completing shopping or other errands.

3. Why do I need to get a flu vaccine earlier this year (September)?

September is the usual start date for administering flu vaccinations in the United States. Getting vaccinated in July or August is considered early but beginning in September or October is a good time to get vaccinated.

In addition, as the flu vaccine or an approved exemption is required at Texas Children's, we strongly encourage our team members to receive the flu shot, beginning in September, to ensure compliance by **the Nov. 1, 2023 requirement date**.

4. What steps are being taken this year to mitigate contact while I'm getting a flu vaccine on site?

- Touchless registration and attestation
- Multiple vaccination locations and times
- 1 on 1 appointments

5. I am working from home, so why do I need to get my flu vaccine this year?

The flu vaccine is mandatory at Texas Children's. Flu vaccinations are very important to reduce flu because it can help reduce the overall impact of respiratory illnesses on the population and, thus, lessen the resulting burden on the community and health care system. A flu vaccine may also provide several individual health benefits, including keeping you from getting sick with flu, reducing the severity of your illness if you do get the flu as well as your risk of a flu-associated hospitalization.

6. What happens if I do not get the flu shot?

Team members who do not receive a flu shot or have an approved exemption by **Nov. 1, 2023** will be subject to disciplinary action up to termination. Team members with approved exemptions will be required to use protective medical equipment, such as gloves and

masks, when providing direct patient care services for the duration of the flu season. For more details, see **Required Influenza Vaccination Policy #317** and **Procedure #4218**.

7. Will employees at Texas Children's Pediatrics, Texas Children's Urgent Care and Texas Children's Specialty Care Centers be vaccinated at their respective practices as in years past?

Yes, employees at Texas Children's Pediatrics, Texas Children's Urgent Care, The Centers for Children and Women (Greenpoint and Southwest), Maternal Fetal Clinics and Texas Children's Specialty Care Centers can receive vaccinations at their respective practices with the support of Employee Health.

8. What does Texas Children's medical insurance cover if I do not want to come on site?

If you participate in a Texas Children's medical plan with Cigna, you may receive flu vaccine at no cost to you at your provider's office or any local retail pharmacy. If you decide to get the flu outside of Texas Children's, please note you will need to upload proof of your vaccination via **texaschildrens.org/employeevaccines**.

There are two ways to locate a participating pharmacy:

- Sign in online at **Express Scripts** and click Prescriptions, then Find a Pharmacy to search for in-network pharmacies convenient for you. You can also log in to Express Scripts via our Benefits website, **texaschildrensbenefits.org**.
- Call Express Scripts Customer Service number at (800) 833-1461 to find a participating pharmacy near you.

Employees may receive the flu vaccine at no cost at any Employee Health clinic.

9. If I receive my flu vaccine outside Texas Children's, when and how do I need to submit proof?

Team members who receive their flu vaccine outside of Texas Children's must submit an attestation and proof of vaccination to Employee Health by **Nov. 1, 2023**, via **texaschildrens.org/employeevaccines**.

10. Who can I call if I have questions about this year's Flu Program?

You can contact Texas Children's Employee Health at 832-824-2150, option 5, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

11. If I am working remotely, can I still get my flu vaccine at Texas Children's?

Yes, Employee Health highly encourages employees working remotely and volunteers who do not have to come on site, to get their flu vaccine at one of Texas Children's vaccination events.

12. Can I get the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine or booster at the same time?

Yes, you can get the most current **COVID-19 vaccines** recommended by the CDC and the flu vaccine at the same time or near the same time.