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**2020-2021 Seasonal Flu Master Key Points for CDC’s Division of Human Development and Disability**

**People with Disabilities\* and Caregivers:**

\* The term “disability” refers to a reduced capacity to move parts of the body (mobility limitation) or to think, understand, remember, or reason (cognitive limitation). Disability also includes people with conditions that affect how their brains and nerves function (neurological and neuro-developmental conditions), which includes disorders of the brain, spinal cord, nerves, and muscles, such as cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, muscular dystrophy, and intellectual disability (the decreased ability to think, learn, and reason). These long-term conditions can make it difficult for a person to do certain activities or to interact in the world around them. In addition, disability includes some people with severe forms of other long-term health conditions, such as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes, which can interfere with and limit participation in daily activities.

1. People with certain types of disabilities are at higher risk for developing flu-related complications that could require hospitalization. A full list of people at higher risk for flu-related complications is at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/high_risk.htm>.
2. The same people with disabilities who are at higher risk for flu complications are also at higher risk for COVID-19 complications.
3. Flu is particularly dangerous for people who may have trouble with muscle function, lung function or difficulty coughing, swallowing, or clearing fluids from their airways. Flu virus infection of the respiratory tract can trigger an extreme inflammatory response in the body and can lead to sepsis, the body’s life-threatening response to infection. Pneumonia is another serious flu complication that can result from either flu virus infection alone or from co-infection of flu virus and bacteria. Other possible serious complications triggered by flu can include inflammation of the heart (myocarditis), brain (encephalitis) or muscle (myositis, rhabdomyolysis) tissues, and multi-organ failure (for example, respiratory and kidney failure). Flu also can make chronic medical problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have flu.
4. People with disabilities may be at risk of getting flu and/or having unrecognized flu symptoms because they
   1. May have limited mobility and cannot avoid coming into contact with others who may be infected, like caretakers and family members;
   2. May have trouble understanding or practicing measures to prevent infections like the flu, such as handwashing, or avoiding contact with people who are sick;
   3. May not be able to communicate if they are sick; or
   4. May not be monitored closely for symptoms of illness.
5. Getting a flu vaccine (flu shot) is the most important action a person with disabilities can take to prevent flu and its complications. Caregivers and family members of people with disabilities can also help to protect them by getting a flu vaccine themselves.
6. CDC recommends that people at higher risk of serious flu complications be treated with flu antiviral drugs if they get sick with flu. Antiviral drugs can make the flu illness milder and shorten the time being sick. They may also prevent serious flu complications.
   1. Flu antiviral drugs work best if taken within the first 48 hours after symptoms start. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/antivirals/index.htm> for more information.
   2. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about possible drug interactions and side effects of your regular prescriptions with flu-related medications. *(See* [*Antiviral Drugs messages*](#Antiviral_drugs)*.)*
7. Take everyday actions to protect your health. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits/index.htm>.
8. What will happen this fall and winter is uncertain, but CDC is preparing for COVID-19 and seasonal flu to spread at the same time. Getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever for protecting the health of people with disabilities.
9. Many people with disabilities have specific chronic conditions that make COVID-19 more serious. People with disabilities need to do what they can to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses and a flu vaccine is that first step.
10. This **fall and winter**, getting a flu vaccine will be more important than ever since hospitals, clinics, and doctors’ offices are likely to be busy caring for COVID-19 patients. Flu vaccination can help conserve scarce medical resources to care for COVID-19 patients while protecting people with disabilities.
11. For the complete interim guidance for immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html.
12. It’s possible that influenza viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will spread at the same time. It is also possible that people may get flu and COVID-19 at the same time if both viruses are circulating. In the context of likely ongoing COVID-19 activity, getting a flu vaccine is more important now than ever, especially for people with disabilities.
13. Getting a flu vaccine will not prevent COVID-19, but it has many important benefits for people with disabilities.
14. Flu vaccination also has been shown in separate studies to be associated with reduced hospitalizations among people with diabetes and chronic lung disease.
15. CDC has developed guidance for providers on how to vaccinate people against flu without increasing their risk of exposure to other respiratory illnesses. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or health department if they are following CDC’s vaccination pandemic guidance. Any vaccination location following CDC’s guidance should be a safe place for you to get a flu vaccine.
16. While flu vaccination is always important, this season getting vaccinated is even more important for certain people who are at higher risk of being exposed to, or developing serious flu **and** COVID-19 complications, or who are caregivers of people who are at higher risk from these two diseases.
17. African American and Hispanic persons are disproportionately affected by disability and diseases like asthma, diabetes, obesity, and other chronic conditions that can increase the risk for serious flu and COVID-19.
18. Caregivers in long-term care facilities—in addition to residents—who are in daily close contact with people who are most vulnerable to serious flu and COVID-19 illness and death should be sure to get their flu vaccine.