

Flu Shots and COVID Boosters: A double shot of protection

It happens every year: flu season, which typically peaks between December and February. This year will mark the third flu season with another virus also circulating: COVID-19. With an updated safe and effective COVID-19 booster shot now available, health experts are urging people to get both the flu and COVID vaccines in order to protect themselves this fall and winter.

Since 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended annual flu vaccines for everyone six months and older, with few exceptions. New this year is an added recommendation for a higher dose for those 65 and older. The CDC has also recommended the use of updated COVID-19 boosters from Pfizer-BioNTech for people ages 12 years and older and from Moderna for people ages 18 years and older.

If you have not yet received your COVID-19 booster shot, or if you still have yet to receive an initial dose, it's not too late.

"I urge everybody who is eligible to get a COVID booster to do so, and the reasons why are multifactorial. Number one is because your immunity wanes and you need to protect yourself. Number two is that the virus has changed slightly and the newest booster is most effective at protecting against those changes," says Dr. Bill Walsh, an OSF HealthCare chief medical officer.

Dr. Walsh adds that it is important to get the seasonal flu shot as well as a COVID shot because they protect against different viruses.

"Please understand that the recommendation is for both the flu shot and the COVID shot. There is no cross reactivity even though the symptoms might be similar between COVID-19 and influenza. The influenza shot will not help against COVID, and the COVID vaccination will not protect you against influenza," Dr. Walsh explains.

The timing of [when to get your flu shot](#) and COVID booster can be confusing. The CDC says if you haven't yet gotten your initial recommended dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, to get one as soon as you can. Health experts typically recommend getting your seasonal flu vaccine by the end of October for best protection during the peak of flu season, and say it is safe to get both vaccines during the same visit.

"There are many times when you get more than one vaccine. Most of the time when you get a tetanus shot, it also includes pertussis. Many of the vaccinations pediatricians give to children have more than one vaccine in each shot. So, it is standard and normal for more than one vaccine to occur at a time," Dr. Walsh says.

Dr. Walsh adds getting both shots done at once alleviates having to make multiple trips to your doctor's office or local pharmacy. But this route may not be for everyone.

As with all vaccinations, there are mild side effects that both vaccines can cause, such as joint or muscle pain, fatigue, and chills. If you have experienced side effects from vaccines in the past and it took a couple days for them to subside, you may opt to get the vaccines at separate times.

"You know yourself best. If you are certain that you will get them both despite not getting them at one appointment, then that is completely fine, too. You may want to space them out because sometimes you have side effects. There have been a lot of questions about whether to get them both in one arm or in different arms so you have different injection sites. That really boils down to personal preference," advises Dr. Walsh.

The important thing is making sure you do get both of these vaccinations to protect both yourself and your loved ones. Because the holiday season is approaching, you may have holiday gatherings on your calendar over the next few months. If you get your flu shot in October but choose to wait to get your COVID-19 booster at a later date, Dr. Walsh recommends getting it at least two weeks before any large gatherings in order to ensure the best protection against the virus.

To schedule your seasonal flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster, make an appointment with your primary care provider or local pharmacy. Talk to your primary care provider if you have any questions about either vaccine.