

## Script – Print – COVID’s Impact on the Flu

### Low Flu Numbers Due to Safety Precautions

As COVID-19 exploded last year, the seasonal flu did an about face, dropping off significantly compared to past years.

The numbers are telling. For example, in the third week of December 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) network of clinical labs reported 16.2% of almost 30,000 samples tested positive for influenza A. During the same period in 2020, only .3% tested positive.

In another example, during the last week of December 2019, the Winnebago County Health Department in Rockford, Ill., reported 198 cases in Winnebago County. During that same time period in 2020, there was one case of influenza.

One of the major reasons is the number of flu vaccines being distributed. According to the CDC, 192.3 million doses of flu vaccine have been distributed as of Dec. 25. That’s the highest number of flu doses distributed in the U.S. during a single influenza season.

“Flu cases have been significantly down this year,” said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Practice, OSF HealthCare. “We anticipated that, but we prepared for the worst. The important message of getting your vaccination for the flu was high priority in communities. The numbers that have been down have been largely due to the number of vaccinations through community healthcare systems and community pharmacies.”

That’s not all. While more people are vigilant about getting the flu vaccine this season, people are also washing their hands, social distancing, wearing masks and traveling less due to COVID-19 – all important factors in the drop in flu cases. Another contributing factor is children learning from home rather than the classroom. Flu typically starts with children.

“Typically immunization rates increase around November to December and that’s been the case this year as well,” said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Practice, OSF HealthCare. “However we see flu cases rise post-holiday season. Right when people are getting back from the holiday, family gatherings – January, February is when we’re usually harder hit.”

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 possibly death. The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu vaccine.

“Typically, fevers, cough, colds, runny nose, are on our radar all the time now,” said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Practice, OSF HealthCare. “I think the number of testing might increase almost proportionate to COVID testing, but the number of positive cases come back for flu are unprecedentedly low. Have I seen flu cases in my office, yes? Would I say weekly, no? Perhaps on average once a month at least in one small office like mine.”

Moving forward, Dr. Zaidi hopes the steps people are taking this flu season is a sign of things to come.

“When we start to value our health day to day and we start to worry about our vulnerable whether it’s our children or our parents, we tend to make more sound, knowledgeable decisions and part of that decision is making sure your preventative care is met and that includes vaccinations.”

Dr. Zaidi adds that this is no time to let our guard down.

“Flu season continues and we will see pattern of peak after the holiday season,” said Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Practice, OSF HealthCare. “It’s the utmost importance that we continue to vaccinate and get your flu shot, typically the vulnerable – the younger and the elderly – and we all hope and pray that we will continue to be safe from whatever ails us as a society.”

For more information about the flu, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).