

It's National Immunization Awareness Month ...

Are You Up to Date on Your Vaccines?

August is National Immunization Awareness Month, so now is the time to make sure you and your family are up to date on immunizations — because in 2021, it's more important than ever.

Many of us delayed routine medical care during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, so we may be behind on immunizations and other preventive care. And, many of us are going back to school and work this fall — perhaps for the first time in more than a year — so it's important to protect ourselves and others against the seasonal flu, COVID-19 and other preventable diseases.

How Do I Know If I Need Immunizations This Year?

- **Flu Vaccine** – Each year, millions of Americans get the flu, hundreds of thousands of people are hospitalized, and tens of thousands of people die from the disease. For example, according to the [CDC](#), during the 2019-2020 flu season, 38 million Americans were infected with influenza, 400,000 Americans were hospitalized, and 22,000 Americans died.

Getting your annual flu shot is the best way to avoid catching and spreading the virus. Everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated every flu season, with a few very rare exceptions.

FLU VACCINE TIP: *Get your shot as early as it becomes available each season (which may be as early as August) and try to get it by at least October. If you're wondering if or when you should get the flu vaccine, check with your doctor.*

- **COVID-19 Vaccine** – According to the [CDC](#), as of early August 2021, almost 35,000,000 Americans have gotten COVID-19, and almost 612,000 Americans have died from the disease. As of July, the COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for Americans 12 and over, with children under 12 expected to be approved soon.

COVID-19 vaccines greatly minimize your chance of getting or becoming seriously ill with COVID-19; greatly minimize your likelihood of spreading COVID-19 to others; and prevent the virus from spreading, replicating or becoming vaccine-resistant.

COVID-19 VACCINE TIP: *Your no-cost vaccine is waiting for you at your local pharmacy. Make sure to get both doses in the recommended time frame to ensure you have maximum protection from the virus.*

- **Other Vaccines** – For adults, some vaccines you received as a child may last a lifetime. Others need to be updated at regular intervals, such as the tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis vaccine (Td/Dtap), for which you need a booster every 10 years. Several vaccines are given to adults for the first time at a certain age; for instance, adults 50 and over should get a two-dose shingles vaccine, while adults 65 and over should get a one-time pneumonia vaccine.

OTHER VACCINES TIP: *Children should get vaccines on a set schedule to stay healthy and to ensure they are in compliance with public school requirements. To find out your child's recommended vaccine schedule — and to learn when vaccines are due for the rest of your family — talk to your doctor.*

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Will Insurance Cover My Immunizations?

- Yes. Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the State's health plan will cover recommended vaccinations — including those for the flu and COVID-19 — at no cost to you. Review the [updated list of vaccinations and other preventive services](#) covered by the ACA.

What Else Can I Do to Protect Myself Against Transmissible Diseases?

In addition to keeping up to date on your vaccines, a few key health practices can help you limit your chance of catching and spreading colds, the flu or COVID-19 — whether or not you've been vaccinated:

- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick, and avoid others when you're not well. If you're sick, stay home. If you have to leave the house, try to visit with people outdoors and maintain social distance. (The "six-foot" rule many of us practiced at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic is still a good one.)
- **Wash your hands** thoroughly and often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you aren't able to wash your hands away from home, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, practice the "vampire cough" by turning your head away from others and coughing into your elbow.
- **Wear a mask.** This practice many of us normalized during the COVID-19 pandemic can be smart going forward, especially for people with compromised immune systems. During peak seasons, if you know someone who is vulnerable or who is too young to be vaccinated, wear a mask in crowded spaces to avoid catching and spreading the cold, flu, or COVID-19.

Where Can I Learn More?

It's important not to put too much trust into what you read online or on social media where misinformation can run rampant. Instead, talk to your family doctor who you know and trust. Don't have a doctor? You can search for in-network providers near you at [Wellmark.com/finder](https://www.wellmark.com/finder).