

## Flu Shot: Please Don't Skip It This Year

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In a typical year, only about [four in 10](#) Kentucky adults get a flu shot, which the overwhelming majority of health experts say is the best way to protect yourself, your family, and your community, against influenza and its potentially serious complications.

The year 2020 was anything but typical. But while reported cases are lower than normal so far this flu season – likely due to people wearing masks and social distancing – the risks of a “twindemic” of the flu and COVID-19 are extremely high. Rampant simultaneous spread of both threaten the very lives of many who don't have the physical and financial resources to fight off two potentially serious viruses at the same time. It also could overwhelm our health care system which, in many areas, is already strained with the large influx of COVID-19 patients.

In the 2019-2020 flu season, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the flu sickened 38 million and hospitalized 400,000 people in the United States. About 22,000 people

died. As startling as those numbers are, they're actually quite low; the flu sickened 45 million, hospitalized 810,000, and killed 61,000 in 2017-2018. The flu is a serious illness.



Meanwhile this year, COVID-19 has already taken more than 300,000 U.S. lives, including those of 2,500 Kentuckians'. Sometimes, the victims were young and otherwise healthy. Most times, they were older, had chronic health conditions, or couldn't find, get to, or afford necessary health care.



If you haven't gotten around to your flu shot this year or you're hesitating, we

encourage you to contact your physician or another trusted health professional to ask your questions. You have a right to answers. Once you get them, please, get your flu shot.

It's absolutely true that the effectiveness of the annual flu shot varies, depending on how closely the vaccine matches the flu strain that's most common in any given year. But multiple studies show that the vaccine prevents tens of thousands of flu-related hospitalizations annually. And even if you get a different strain of flu than is addressed by this year's vaccine, your symptoms are much more likely to be milder and your risk of serious complications lower, than if you skip the flu shot. Moreover, the flu vaccine has a cumulative effect, so each year you get the vaccine, you're building your immunity for that year and future years. And in no case can the flu shot give you the flu.

It's not just you or your family at risk when Kentuckians skip their annual flu shots. It's someone's aging mother, another person's brother with cancer, your neighbor with asthma, or

the front-line essential workers who show up every day to help you and your family get what you need. It's also the health care system, which is already stretched caring for a stubbornly high number of COVID patients.

Raising concerns about the risks of a twindemic of flu and COVID is not a scare tactic. It's a reality check. And each of us has a very important tool we can use to reduce those risks.

So, Raise Your Guard, Kentucky. Schedule your flu shot today.

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