NYC Health

Older Adults Should Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19, Flu and RSV

Respiratory viruses, such as COVID-19, influenza (flu) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), spread through coughing, sneezing and breathing, and are more common in fall and winter. There are new vaccines to protect people from COVID-19, flu and RSV. If you are an older adult (age 65 or older), get vaccinated as soon as possible to make sure you are protected.

What vaccines do I need to stay safe?
You should get an updated COVID-19 vaccine, which became available in September 2023, and an annual flu shot, even if you have been vaccinated before. The COVID-19 vaccines have been updated to protect against current variants of the virus and strengthen your protection, which can decrease over time. The flu shot is updated annually to protect against the strains expected to spread.

You should discuss with your health care provider whether to get an RSV vaccine, available for people age 60 and older. This is the first year RSV vaccines are available. You should also ask your provider if you are up to date on other vaccines, such as the pneumococcal vaccine, which protects against certain bacterial infections, including pneumonia.

Why is it important for older adults to get vaccinated?
Older adults are at increased risk of getting seriously ill, being hospitalized and dying from COVID-19, flu and RSV. Certain underlying medical conditions, such as chronic kidney disease, heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, increase the risk of severe illness from these viruses.

Recently in the U.S., about 70% to 85% of flu deaths, 50% to 70% of flu hospitalizations and more than 75% of COVID-19 deaths occurred among people age 65 and older.

Which COVID-19 vaccine should I get, and how many doses do I need?
You can choose which vaccine to get, regardless of which vaccines you received before. All updated vaccines are designed to protect against the same variants.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends people age 65 and older get one additional dose of any updated vaccine at least four months after their previous shot. If you are moderately or severely immunocompromised, ask your provider if they recommend further additional doses.

Which flu vaccine should I get this year?
People age 65 and older should get one dose of the high-dose, adjuvanted or recombinant flu vaccine because these vaccines work better in older adults.

Are there side effects from the COVID-19, flu and RSV vaccines?
For most people, side effects are mild and go away within a few days. Common side effects include soreness in the arm, headache, body aches and tiredness. You cannot get COVID-19, flu or RSV from the vaccines.

Where can I get vaccinated?
Ask your provider if they offer vaccination. There are also hundreds of vaccination sites, including pharmacies, around the city that offer COVID-19 and flu vaccines on a walk-in basis. To find a site, visit vaccinefinder.nyc.gov or call 212-COVID-19 (212-268-4319). Many health centers offer the RSV vaccine, as do some pharmacies with a prescription from your provider.

Will my health insurance cover vaccination?
Medicare, Medicaid and most health plans cover COVID-19, flu, RSV and other vaccinations without a copayment or other cost-sharing. Make sure you go to a provider that accepts your insurance.

What if I do not have insurance?
Free COVID-19 vaccines are available to people without insurance or with limited insurance coverage. To find a site that offers free vaccines, visit vaccinefinder.nyc.gov, click the "Any insurance" drop-down and see options for "no cost."

Can I get the COVID-19, flu and RSV vaccines at the same time?
Yes, you can get all three vaccines at the same time.

Can I still get COVID-19, flu or RSV if I have been vaccinated?
Yes. While the vaccines lower your risk of infection, you can still become infected, especially as more time passes since you have been vaccinated. However, if you become infected, the vaccines help reduce symptoms and the risk of complications, including hospitalization and death. COVID-19 vaccines also reduce the risk of long COVID (symptoms that last for months or longer after COVID-19 infection).

If you have respiratory virus symptoms, such as cough, runny nose, congestion, sore throat, fever or body aches, contact your provider right away to get tested. Medication is available for older adults with COVID-19 or flu, and treatment works the sooner you begin. There is no specific treatment for RSV, but providers may recommend medication to reduce symptoms.

If you do not have a provider, contact NYC Health + Hospitals Virtual ExpressCare at expresscare.nyc or 631-EXP-Care (631-397-2273).

What other steps can I take to protect myself from respiratory viruses?
You should consider wearing a well-fitting mask in crowded indoor spaces. A high-quality mask, such as an N95, a KN95 or a KF94, offers better protection. You should also wash your hands and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

For more information about COVID-19, flu and RSV, visit on.nyc.gov/covid-flu-rsv-faq.

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