



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
David A. Chokshi, MD, MSc  
Commissioner

August 13, 2020

Dear Colleague,

The New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) would like to inform you that the initial distribution of seasonal flu vaccine for the 2020-2021 season has begun. As influenza and the novel coronavirus causing COVID-19 are expected to cocirculate this year, you should use every opportunity to administer flu vaccine to all your patients to reduce the burden of respiratory illnesses and protect vulnerable populations at risk for severe illness.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) continues to recommend that all people 6 months of age and older receive an annual flu vaccine. Please vaccinate all your patients and staff, especially those at high risk for severe disease and complications from influenza, including children less than 5 years of age, people with underlying chronic medical conditions, pregnant patients, and people age 65 and older. Flu vaccination may start as soon as the vaccine is available, especially for children who need two doses of vaccine to be protected since the doses must be given at least four weeks apart.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends starting vaccination in September for adults, particularly older adults. Although there is concern about waning immunity and vaccine protection over the influenza season, delaying vaccination must be weighed against the risks of missed opportunities to vaccinate or vaccination after the influenza season begins. Continue vaccinating as long as influenza viruses are circulating, through spring 2021 or later; NYC has had second outbreaks as late as May.

#### **Ordering Through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program**

The Health Department is now accepting VFC flu vaccine orders; all VFC orders must be placed electronically, using the Citywide Immunization Registry (CIR), at [nyc.gov/health/cir](https://nyc.gov/health/cir). After logging into the CIR, click on the Vaccine Inventory Management (VIM) icon and select the Order Influenza tab.

**Please submit an order for all the flu vaccine you will need for the entire 2020-2021 season.**

Fluzone (Sanofi Pasteur), Flulaval (GSK), and Fluarix (GSK) are all licensed for use in patients 6 months and older. The following presentations can be used for all children starting at 6 months of age: 0.5 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes and 0.5 mL single-dose vials of Fluzone, 0.5 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes of Flulaval, and 0.5 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes of Fluarix. When placing your VFC order, you should indicate the total amount of inactivated flu vaccine you need to vaccinate your 6 months through 18-year-old population. Your facility may receive any of these products, depending on availability, and they are to be considered equivalent. FluMist (live-attenuated influenza vaccine quadrivalent [LAIV] [AstraZeneca]) is one of the recommended flu vaccines, and can be used for children 2 through 18 years of age. The ordering screens will have a separate line for you to indicate the total number of FluMist vaccine doses you want to receive for the 2020-2021 season.

The VFC ordering tool is designed to help ensure that all of your VFC-eligible population is properly immunized against influenza. The recommended order quantity column is an estimate of the **minimum** number of flu vaccine doses your site needs for the 2020-2021 influenza season. Please use these recommendations as a guide when ordering your flu vaccine. It is not required that you order the recommended amount — you can order more or less — and you can adjust your order in the [Online Registry](#) during the season, as needed. Flu vaccine is not included in your practice’s doses administered report (DAR) calculation, so you will not be penalized for any unused vaccine. We expect to be able to supply you with enough flu vaccine to immunize all your VFC-eligible patients though, as in the past, you will receive partial shipments until your order is filled. The amount of and timing when vaccine will be shipped will depend on flu vaccine availability to the NYC VFC program. You will be able to track your flu vaccine shipments in the Online Registry. As we have said in the past, please order more vaccine if you see that you are about to run out.

If you need assistance with submitting your order or have questions, email [nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov](mailto:nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov) or call the VFC program at 347-396-2489. We expect demand to be high this year due to the possible cocirculation of COVID-19 and increased promotion campaigns. The Health Department has secured additional VFC flu vaccine in anticipation of high demand and also because more children may be eligible for the VFC program now. We expect to have sufficient vaccine to meet this demand due to the supplemental vaccine we will be receiving.

### **Influenza Updates for the 2020-2021 Season**

This year’s trivalent egg-based flu vaccine contain the following virus strains: A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL 1536/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus, A/Hong Kong /2671/2019 (H3N2)-like virus, and B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus. Quadrivalent egg-based vaccines, which protect against a second lineage of B viruses, will contain the same viruses as the trivalent vaccine plus B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (Yamagata lineage) virus.

Quadrivalent cell- or recombinant-based vaccines contain: A/Hawaii/70/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus, A/Hong Kong/45/2019 (H3N2)-like virus, B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus, and B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (Yamagata lineage) virus. Both A virus components, as well as the first B component, were updated, for both the egg-based and cell or recombinant-based vaccines to better match viruses expected to be circulating in the United States in the upcoming influenza season. The B/Yamagata lineage vaccine component was not updated.

For the 2020-2021 influenza season, ACIP supports the use of any age-appropriate, licensed flu vaccine, in harmony with guidance from the CDC; there is no preference for one vaccine over another (except as noted in the paragraph below regarding FluMist). New vaccines licensed for use in the upcoming season are:

- 1) A quadrivalent high-dose vaccine (Fluzone High-Dose Quadrivalent [Sanofi Pasteur]) licensed for use in adults 65 years of age and older, which replaces the previously licensed trivalent high-dose vaccine.
- 2) A quadrivalent adjuvanted vaccine (Fluad Quadrivalent [Seqirus]) licensed for use in adults 65 years of age and older, which is similar to the previously licensed trivalent vaccine containing the same MF59 adjuvant.

Updated ACIP guidance clarifies that FluMist should not be used in patients with cochlear implants, active cerebrospinal fluid leaks, and anatomical or functional asplenia. In addition, due to newer antivirals having longer half-lives, insufficient data are available on the use of FluMist in the setting of antiviral use, other than Tamiflu.

As was the case during the last influenza season, all children 6 months through 59 months of age enrolled in NYC Article 47 and 43 regulated child care, Head Start, nursery and prekindergarten programs must receive one dose of flu vaccine between July 1 and December 31 of each year. Although some children may need a second dose in order to comply with ACIP recommendations, that second dose will not be required for program attendance.

### **Flu Vaccination During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

While it is not possible to say with certainty what will happen during the upcoming influenza season, CDC believes it is likely that both influenza viruses and SARS-CoV-2 will be circulating at the same time. Getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever to help reduce the overall impact of respiratory illnesses on the population and lessen the resulting burden on the health care system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CDC advises that providers use every opportunity to administer flu vaccines to all eligible persons, including:

- Essential workers: Health care personnel, including nursing home, long-term care facility, and pharmacy staff, and other [critical infrastructure](#) workforce.
- Persons at increased risk for [severe illness from COVID-19](#): Including adults age 65 years and older, residents in a nursing home or long-term care facility, persons of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions. Severe illness from COVID-19 has been observed to disproportionately affect members of certain [racial/ethnic minority groups](#). In NYC, Black and Hispanic New Yorkers have disproportionately carried the burden of severe illness from COVID-19.
- [Persons at high risk for influenza complications](#): Including infants and young children, children with neurologic conditions, pregnant patients, adults age 65 years and older, and other persons with certain underlying medical conditions.

CDC has issued interim guidance on how to safely provide immunization services, including flu vaccine, during the pandemic, see the CDC's [Vaccination Guidance During a Pandemic](#) and [Guidance for Planning Vaccination Clinics Held at Satellite, Temporary, or Off-Site Locations](#).

Flu vaccination should be deferred for people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of their symptoms, in order to avoid exposing health care personnel. Providers should minimize the potential of COVID-19 transmission during all patient visits, including those for flu vaccination, and should wear gloves when giving FluMist because of the increased likelihood of coming into contact with a patient's mucous membranes and body fluids. Giving this vaccine is not considered an aerosol-generating procedure and thus the use of an N95 or higher-level respirator is not recommended. Providers should remove their gloves and wash their hands after FluMist administration, as well as after administering inactivated flu vaccine if the health care provider chooses to use gloves during the injection.

### **Flu Vaccine Coverage**

In NYC, pediatric flu vaccine coverage increased in the 2019-2020 season compared to the previous season, but for children age 5 through 18 years, the rate is still well below the Healthy People 2020 goal of 70%. In 2019-2020, 77% of children age 6 through 59 months received at least one dose of flu vaccine (data from the CIR); this rate is very good and likely due to the child care flu vaccine mandate. However, only 57% of children age 5 through 8 years, and 44% of children age 9 through 18 years received at least one dose of flu vaccine in 2019-2020. Similarly, only 48% of persons 18 years of age and older, and 68% of persons 65 years of age and older, reported receiving a flu vaccine according to the 2019 NYC Community Health Survey, compared to the Healthy People 2020 goal of 70%. Further, among adults ages 18 years and older, non-Hispanic Black individuals reported significantly lower coverage at 43% than non-Hispanic White individuals (51%), Hispanics (49%) and Asian/Pacific Islanders (49%).

### **Vaccine Ordering For Non-VFC Eligible Children and Adults**

Most providers and facilities would have placed their flu vaccine orders back in February through April. If you need to order vaccine for non-VFC eligible children and adults, you should contact the vaccine manufacturers or distributors. For a list of vaccine manufacturers and distributors, visit [izsummitpartners.org/ivats](http://izsummitpartners.org/ivats), which will soon be updated to reflect flu vaccines available this coming season. You will need to confirm product availability directly with vaccine manufacturers and distributors. Please note that NYS Public Health Law§2112, effective July 1, 2008, prohibits the administration of vaccines containing more than trace amounts of thimerosal to children younger than 3 years of age and to patients who know they are pregnant (pregnancy testing is not required prior to vaccination). Be sure to order enough of the preservative-free, single-dose presentations of flu vaccine to immunize all of these patients in your practice. In addition to the pediatric formulations listed above, the other non-VFC flu vaccine option for children 6 to 35 months of age is the 0.25 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes of Afluria (Sequiris).

### **Vaccinating Children 6 Months Through 8 Years of Age**

In the 2020-2021 season, the recommendation for flu vaccination of children 6 months through 8 years of age is unchanged: children in that age group who have not received two doses of flu vaccine prior to July 1, 2020, will require two doses of flu vaccine, administered at least four weeks apart. The two previous doses do not need to have been given during the same season or consecutive seasons. If a child under 9 years of age has previously received two doses of flu vaccine, that child will need only one dose this season.

### **Using the CIR for Flu Vaccination Quality Improvement**

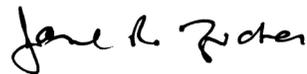
You can run your own childhood flu vaccination up-to-date report in the [Online Registry](#) so that you can track your coverage and identify patients who have not yet received their flu vaccine. Once you log onto the CIR, click on "Tools" in the top row, then "Standard or Flu Coverage Report." In the middle of the page, you will see "Influenza Coverage Report." Indicate which age groups you would like to run coverage for (you may choose all), then click "Continue" and your report(s) will run. The screen will direct you to where the report(s) are stored. When you find your report, click on "Done" in the last column of the row that contains your report. You will then be given the option to "Create Recall List," which will create lists, labels and letters for you. Alternatively, if you wish to text message your patients due for flu (or any other) vaccine, click on "Recall" in the top row, then choose the combination "Recall," "Custom," "Text Message" and "One Time" or "Recurrent," then click on "Continue." You will be directed to the custom recall screen, and given directions on completing your

text-messaging job. We encourage you to implement quality improvement activities and strive to increase coverage over last year.

For your adult patients, we strongly encourage you to report vaccine doses administered to the CIR with your patients' verbal or written consent. You can also check the CIR to see if your adult patients received flu vaccine at another location. The CIR consolidates immunizations across providers and, using all reported immunizations, provides decision support in determining which immunizations are due and when they should be administered. As stated in the paragraph above, the CIR also offers tools to send patients reminder-recall text messages for vaccines that are due. Reminder-recall, in combination with other evidence-based best practices, such as using standing orders, self-screening tools, and following the National Vaccine Advisory Committee (NVAC) [Standards for Adult Immunization Practice](#), can help to ensure that your patients' vaccinations are up-to-date.

Please make every effort to vaccinate all your patients, using evidence-based strategies to increase coverage rates in your facility. For current information about influenza, visit [nyc.gov/flu](http://nyc.gov/flu). For questions on flu vaccine, other than those pertaining to your VFC order, call (347) 396-2400 or email [nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov](mailto:nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov). As always, we will send out updates throughout the season to keep you informed. We thank you for helping to protect NYC residents from influenza.

Sincerely,



Jane R. Zucker, MD, MSc  
Assistant Commissioner  
Bureau of Immunization  
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene