



Talking with Adults about Vaccines to Prevent Respiratory Illnesses During Cold and Flu Season

Several vaccines are available to prevent common respiratory diseases we expect to see this fall and winter: COVID-19, influenza (flu), pneumococcal pneumonia, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Use the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's SHARE approach and the key points below to help you discuss these vaccines with your patients and make recommendations.

- Flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.
- COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older.
- RSV vaccine is recommended for people 60 years and older based on shared clinical decision making.
- Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for everyone 65 and older and for people younger than 65 who have certain medical conditions.

SHARE*

Share the reasons why vaccination is right for your patient.

Highlight positive experiences with vaccination.

Address patient questions and any concerns.

Remind patients that vaccines help protect them and their loved ones.

Explain the potential costs of getting sick.

*For more details, see www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/professionals/vaccination/make-strong-flu-vaccination-rec-2020.pdf.

KEY POINTS ABOUT ADULT VACCINES

- **Recommend needed vaccines at every clinical encounter:** "I strongly recommend you get [COVID-19, flu, RSV, and/or pneumococcal] vaccination(s) to protect you during respiratory season. These vaccines can be given on the same day."
 - *Tailor the message based on the vaccines that the patient needs, their eligibility, their risk factors, and their willingness to get more than one vaccine at a time.*
 - *Discuss viruses circulating in your community.*
 - *See Immunize.org's [Fall 2023 Vaccine Decision Making for People 60 and Over](#) for vaccine coadministration strategies and [How to Administer Multiple Intramuscular Vaccines](#).*
- **Use a presumptive approach:** "Today we are giving you your [COVID-19, flu, RSV, and/or pneumococcal] vaccine(s)."
 - *Providing vaccines at the current visit is key; vaccine uptake drops considerably when patients are referred out for vaccination.*
 - *For patients who do not want all vaccines at once or if your office does not stock all the recommended vaccines, help patients make plans to get needed vaccines.*
- **Communicate why we vaccinate:** "Vaccination helps prevent illnesses and severe outcomes. Preventing illness means you won't lose time away from work, miss family obligations, or need extra visits to the doctor."
 - *Tailor messages by discussing patients' specific risk factors for severe disease, as well as family or other circumstances that make it especially important for them to get vaccinated.*
- **Communicate unpredictability of respiratory viruses:** "The timing and severity of respiratory virus seasons are unpredictable. The best way to prepare is to get the vaccines you need today."
- **Keep it simple:** "Vaccination helps reduce severe illness and the risk of hospitalization. Complications from respiratory infections can happen to anyone, but are most likely in older adults and people with health issues."
 - *Focus on one vaccine at a time in your discussion.*

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KEY POINTS ABOUT VACCINE-PREVENTABLE RESPIRATORY DISEASES

Flu

- Flu causes severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths every year. The vaccine will prevent or reduce your risk of these consequences.
- The vaccine is updated to cover the flu strains we expect to see this season.
- The flu vaccine is safe and does not cause the flu.

COVID-19

- The vaccine released in fall 2023 contains an updated strain not included in prior COVID-19 vaccines.
- COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and severe side effects are rare.
- COVID-19 vaccines prevent severe COVID-19 and related complications.

RSV

- RSV can lead to severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths, especially in older adults and young children.

- RSV causes cold-like symptoms in some, but people at higher risk may get lung infections, need oxygen, and develop respiratory distress.
- The RSV vaccine is new this fall (2023) and recommended for people 60 and older, based on shared clinical decision making.
- Factors to consider when deciding about RSV vaccination include the risk of severe illness (see the box) and potential side effects.

Pneumococcal

- Pneumococcal disease is caused by bacteria that can result in pneumonia, blood infections (sepsis), middle ear infections (otitis media), or infections of the lining of the brain (meningitis).
 - *These infections can follow or occur with viral infections like influenza.*
- Pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for people 65 and older and people younger than 65 with high-risk conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease.

Shared Clinical Decision Making for People Age 60 and Older: Risk Factors Associated with Severe RSV*

- Lung disease (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] or asthma)
- Cardiovascular disease (heart failure or coronary artery disease)
- Moderate or severe immunocompromise
- Diabetes mellitus
- Neurologic or neuromuscular conditions
- Kidney disorders
- Liver disorders
- Hematologic disorders
- Other underlying conditions that might increase the risk for severe respiratory disease
- Frailty
- Advanced age
- Nursing home or long-term care facility resident

*The decision to vaccinate against RSV may be informed by a patient's health status, their risk of severe RSV disease, the health care provider's clinical judgment, the patient's preferences, the safety profile of the RSV vaccine products, and other factors. See www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rsv/hcp/older-adults.html for more about recommending RSV vaccine.

