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California Immunization Coalition and California Chronic Care Coalition Urge People to Get Vaccinated During Seasonal Influenza and COVID-19 “Twindemic”

The flu weakens the immune system, those living with chronic conditions / disease, more susceptible to contracting serious and deadly cases of COVID-19

SACRAMENTO – To help protect people from severe COVID-19, the [California Immunization Coalition](#) (CIC) and the [California Chronic Care Coalition](#) (CCCC) urge the public to get their influenza (flu) shot as the 2020-2021 flu season approaches. The viruses that cause the flu weaken the immune system, making people living with chronic conditions more susceptible to the coronavirus which causes COVID-19.

“We are facing a dangerous double whammy in the coming months,” said CIC Executive Director Catherine Flores Martin. “Contracting the flu and getting COVID-19 on top of it can be deadly, so don’t wait – vaccinate. Make plans to get a flu shot now to keep you and your family protected from influenza during the pandemic.”

Those at most risk for developing complications from the seasonal flu include people living with chronic conditions such as asthma, lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, liver and kidney disorders, autoimmune disease, cancer, and blood disorders. In addition, it is important that everyone over the age of 65 receive a flu vaccine:

- 80 percent of COVID-related deaths have occurred in people over 65-years-old
- Approximately 80 percent of older adults have at least one chronic disease and 77 percent live with at least two
- Between 50 percent and 70 percent of seasonal flu-related hospitalizations are for people over the age of 65

“The seasonal flu can be devastating on its own, particularly in those living with chronic conditions,” said CCCC President & CEO, Liz Helms. “And those with chronic disease are also more vulnerable for complications if they contract COVID-19, making the coming months even more precarious, and even deadly, for so many Californians.”

The CIC recommends getting immunized for the flu in late September or early October. The flu season generally peaks between December and February. Less than half of US adults receive a flu vaccine each year. A recent [study](#) found vaccine coverage estimates in 2018-2019 remained substantially lower for non-Hispanic Black (39.4%), Hispanic (37.1%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (37.6%) adults compared to non-Hispanic White adults (48.7%). In the 2019-2020 flu season, an estimated 60,000 people in the U.S. died from the flu, and influenza viruses caused up to 740,000 hospitalizations.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says flu vaccination can help protect people living with chronic disease avoid worsening illness:

- Flu vaccination is associated with lower rates of cardiac events among people with heart disease, especially among those who have had a cardiac event in the past year
- Flu vaccination can reduce hospitalization for flu-related chronic lung disease, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Flu vaccination is shown in separate studies to be associated with reduced hospitalizations among people with diabetes

“Preventing cases of the flu through vaccination will not only protect seniors and those living with chronic disease from potentially the deadly impact of flu , but since COVID-19 and flu symptoms are similar every person without flu symptoms will be one less person who will worry they have COVID-19 or which would further strain our already overburdened clinics and hospitals,” said Randy Bergen, MD, CIC board president and senior physician at Kaiser Permanente Medical Group in Walnut Creek.

Because of COVID-19 people may be wary of venturing out to get their flu shots this year, but most medical offices and clinics are taking precautions to protect patients seeking vaccinations and well-care. These precautions include separate facilities for seeing well-patients, scheduling well visits in the morning and visits for those with symptoms in the afternoon. The CIC and CCCC recommend people seeking the seasonal flu shot contact their medical providers or their local pharmacy to learn about the systems they have in place to protect patients seeking needed care like vaccines, and to find out when they can schedule their flu vaccine. In California, many pharmacies are already offering flu shots and they are an excellent option for many families. Visit vaccinefinder.org to find a place nearby to get flu vaccine.

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About the California Immunization Coalition

The California Immunization Coalition (CIC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit public-private partnership dedicated to achieving and maintaining full immunization protection for all Californians to promote health and prevent serious illness, disability and death. For more information, please visit immunizeca.org and follow CIC on social media @ImmunizeCA.

About the California Chronic Care Coalition

The California Chronic Care Coalition (CCCC) is a 501 (c) non-profit public benefit organization of more than 30 leading health organizations and provider groups that promote the collaborative work of policy makers, industry leaders, providers and consumers to improve the health of Californians with chronic conditions. We envision a system of care that is accessible, affordable and of a high quality that emphasizes prevention, coordinated care, and the patient's wellness and longevity. californiachroniccare.org