

Flu symptoms mimic COVID-19 infection: Experts urge flu vaccination

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Cases of influenza are being reported in parts of the U.S. as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. While a vaccine is not yet available for COVID-19, there is a vaccine available to prevent influenza.

"This season is more important to get the [flu vaccine](#) because the flu also has symptoms that mimic COVID-19 infection," says Dr. Robert Jacobson, a pediatrician and [vaccine](#) researcher at Mayo Clinic Children's Center. And there is some evidence that having the flu and COVID-19 at the same time may put you at higher risk of complications."

He says it is especially important that children be vaccinated.

"When a child gets the flu, they're more likely to give it to adults and others who cannot handle influenza," says Dr. Jacobson. "We really need to prevent every single case of flu."

"Across the U.S, there have been more deaths in children due to the flu than ever recorded before. It's still measured in the hundreds. But in adults, and in older people, the rates of death are much

higher, and the rates of hospitalization or critical care admissions are much higher. And it is children who often start the local outbreaks," says Dr. Jacobson. "Vaccinating children has always been critical to proving flu spreading in the community." Some similar symptoms for COVID-19 and flu include cough, fever, sore throat, runny nose and tiredness.

"The flu as a rule tends to show up a day or two after you've been exposed; whereas, COVID-19 can actually show up two to 14 days after you were exposed," says Dr. Jacobson. "The flu can be hard on a person. It can cause complications. It can even cause death. But we're seeing much higher rates of severe disease, much higher rates of hospitalization and much higher rates of death with COVID-19 than we are seeing with the flu."

"Furthermore, while the flu does spread by contagion, we're actually seeing the COVID-19 spread faster and infect more people when exposed," says Dr. Jacobson. "There are some big differences between COVID-19 and the flu. They do behave differently, though they may present similarly and result in the need for testing. In fact, Mayo Clinic right now is developing a test that it can use that will test for both COVID-19 and flu simultaneously."

The flu vaccine won't prevent COVID-19, but it can reduce the risk for developing the flu and reduce the burden on the health care system during the pandemic. "Every one of us should be getting the flu vaccine every year, and this year, it's more important than ever," says Dr. Jacobson. "The vaccine is needed. The vaccine is safe. The vaccines are effective. And we really don't have alternatives of vaccine."

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