

Governor Phil Murphy

# ICYMI: New Jersey Department of Health Encourages Flu Shot, COVID-19 Boosters Ahead of Holidays

11/22/2022

*Residents Should Take Precautions Against Other Respiratory Viruses*

**TRENTON** – With holiday gatherings kicking off this week with Thanksgiving, the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) is encouraging everyone 6 months of age and older to get their annual flu shot and COVID-19 booster when eligible, and is urging residents to take precautions as other respiratory illnesses, including Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infection (RSV), continue to circulate.

New Jersey, as well as much of the rest of the country, has seen an earlier start to the flu season this year. Respiratory Syncytial Virus as well as rhinovirus and enterovirus and COVID-19 are also circulating in the state. NJDOH is monitoring and watching hospitalizations and pediatric intensive care units daily throughout the state.

“As New Jerseyans begin to gather with friends and family for the upcoming holidays, it’s important for everyone to continue taking the necessary precautions to keep themselves and their loved ones safe,” **said Governor Phil Murphy**. “Getting vaccinated when recommended, practicing good hand and respiratory hygiene, and staying home when sick are ways residents can work together to have a happier and healthier holiday season.”

“Getting an annual flu shot will help protect everyone, particularly vulnerable residents such as younger children and older adults, from influenza,” **said Commissioner Judith Persichilli**. “The Department is monitoring these respiratory illnesses closely, and their impact on hospitals and Emergency Departments.”

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also recommends that everyone stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines for their age group ([https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html?s\\_cid=11369:are%20children%20eligible%20for%20covid%20vaccine.sem.ga:p:RG:GM:gen:PTN:FY21](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html?s_cid=11369:are%20children%20eligible%20for%20covid%20vaccine.sem.ga:p:RG:GM:gen:PTN:FY21)). Everyone 6 months of age and older is eligible to receive a COVID-19 primary series and people 5 years of age and older are recommended to receive the updated booster at least 2 months after their primary series or last monovalent booster.

RSV (<https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/index.html>), which usually circulates in the state from late fall to early spring, causes common cold symptoms in adults and older children, while in younger children and infants, it can cause wheezing and pneumonia. However, it can also cause more severe infection. Most people recover in a week or two, but RSV can be serious (<https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/high-risk/infants-young-children.html>), especially for infants and older adults.

At the same time, the state is seeing many children with infections in the upper airways and lungs due to rhinovirus ([dotw/common-cold/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/dotw/common-cold/index.html)) and enterovirus (<https://www.cdc.gov/dotw/enteroviruses/index.html>), which can result in wheezing and breathing difficulties.

Parents should call their pediatrician or a healthcare provider if their child has any of the following symptoms: rapid breathing, wheezing or shortness of breath; ribs pulling in with each breath; is very ill or drowsy; poor eating; dehydration; vomiting for more than 24 hours; fever in a child younger than 12 weeks. While these are warning signs, please consult your healthcare provider for any other symptom that is severe or concerning.

Individuals can take precautions by continuing to wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, cough into their elbows or sleeves, and get immunized for influenza and COVID-19. Individuals at high risk for severe illness and their visitors should consider wearing a high-quality, well-fitting mask which may help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses. Individuals who are sick should remain at home.

Flu vaccination prevents millions of illnesses and flu-related doctor’s visits each year. Despite these benefits, during the 2021-2022 flu seasons, only 57% of adults (18 and older) and 67.7% of children (6 months –17 years old) in New Jersey received a flu vaccine.

Flu vaccination is available at healthcare provider offices, pharmacies, federally qualified health centers (<https://www.nj.gov/health/lh/documents/LocalHealthDirectory.pdf>). Many vaccines are covered by insurers at little to no cost to individuals. In addition, NJDOH’s Vaccine Preventable Disease Program (<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/vdpdp.shtml>) (VPDP) helps to reduce economic barriers to childhood vaccines through the Vaccines for Children program which offers vaccines at no cost to eligible children through healthcare providers enrolled in the program. The VPDP also participates in the 317-funded adult program which provides vaccines to uninsured and underinsured adults.

COVID-19 vaccination locations can be found using the NJ Vaccine Appointment Finder (

“Vaccines have proven to be safe and effective,” **said Commissioner Persichilli**. “We urge all New Jerseyans to get up to date on all recommended vaccinations to ensure a safe and healthy holiday season. We especially encourage all New Jerseyans, ages 5 and older, to get the new updated booster to ensure the strongest protection against COVID-19 variants.”

# Governor Phil Murphy

# Statewide

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