



Risk Less. Do More. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Pan Respiratory Virus Public Education Campaign

Risk Less. Do More., the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Pan Respiratory Virus (PRV) Public Education Campaign, seeks to inform the public about influenza (flu), COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccines. *Risk Less. Do More.* aims to:

- Motivate higher uptake of flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines during the 2024–2025 season, reducing the public health burden of respiratory viruses for individuals, families, communities, and the nation;
- Increase public confidence in flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines;
- Cultivate vaccine literacy; and
- Enhance awareness of vaccine accessibility, especially within vulnerable communities.

The following talking points provide evidence-based background and messaging to help expert spokespersons prepare for media interviews about flu, COVID-19, and RSV viruses and vaccines.

Key Messages for Respiratory Viruses and Vaccines

- **Viruses cause most respiratory illnesses.** Runny nose, sore throat, sneezing, and coughing are often caused by viruses. Vaccines are the best protection from getting very sick from flu, COVID-19, and RSV.
- **Prevention is the best option.** Masks and handwashing can play an important role in protecting against the spread of respiratory viruses. Vaccines provide the best protection against severe disease from flu, COVID-19, and RSV. Vaccines boost the body's natural defenses against germs that can make you sick.
- **Older adults are at higher risk.** If you help care for a family member or friend age 60 or older, make sure they know about their risk for getting very sick with flu, COVID-19, and RSV and that vaccines can help protect them.
- **Vaccines protect pregnant people and newborns.** Getting sick with flu or COVID-19 can be very dangerous for pregnant people and their babies. RSV is also a serious risk for newborns. When pregnant people get a vaccine for the flu, COVID-19, or RSV, their babies are protected in their first 6 months.
- **Vaccines are tested.** Vaccines go through a lot of testing—both in the lab and with volunteers—before they are available to the public. Although vaccines keep some people from getting the flu, COVID-19, or RSV, the thing they do best is to help keep symptoms mild to keep people out of the hospital if they get infected.
- **Misinformation can have dangerous consequences.** False and misleading information about vaccines causes people to make decisions that could be dangerous to their health. If friends or family share wrong information, listen to why they believe it, show you understand, and guide them to good sources that don't make money or gain power from the information.
- **Visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) to learn more** about flu, COVID-19 and RSV vaccines, or talk to a health care provider about which 2024–2025 vaccines are right for you.

Respiratory infections are usually caused by viruses.

- Infections in the respiratory system—including the nose, sinuses, and lungs—are usually caused by viruses. Flu, COVID-19, and RSV are respiratory illnesses that can become serious.
- Infections from respiratory viruses can surge in the fall and winter.

- People are indoors more often in the fall and winter, making it easier for viruses to pass from person to person. And the cold, dry air may make it harder for the body to fight off illness.
- Illnesses from flu, COVID-19, and RSV viruses put about 800,000 people in the hospital last fall and winter.
- People who live in nursing homes and other places where a lot of people live close to each other get sick more often with flu, COVID-19, and RSV because they are more likely to be exposed to these viruses.
- People who are vaccinated are less likely than people who are not vaccinated to get flu or COVID-19.
 - Although vaccines keep some from getting flu and COVID-19, the thing vaccines do best is to keep symptoms mild and keep people out of the hospital if they get an infection.
- Most deaths from respiratory viruses are in people ages 65 or older, and the risk grows with age.
 - Older adults should protect themselves from severe illness by getting vaccines for flu, COVID-19, and RSV.
- Infants are at risk from respiratory viruses.
 - When a pregnant person gets flu and COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy, both the pregnant person and their baby can avoid serious illness.
 - An RSV vaccine during pregnancy helps protect the baby from severe RSV during their first 6 months of life. RSV is the most common cause of infant hospitalization.

Prevention is the best option.

- Prevention is the best way to keep from getting very sick from flu, COVID-19, and RSV. There are many ways to avoid respiratory illnesses this fall and winter. The more of these you do, the better:
 - Take steps for cleaner air by going outside, opening windows, or using a fan.
 - Wear a mask in public places, especially in crowds.
 - Wash your hands frequently and use hand sanitizer.
 - Get vaccinated.
 - Vaccines boost the body's natural defenses against germs that can make you sick.
 - Vaccines are your best protection against severe disease from flu, COVID-19, and RSV.
- The ideal time to get vaccinated varies by vaccine.
 - The best time to get a flu shot is September and October, but getting vaccinated against flu later in the fall and winter can also help symptoms be less severe if you get flu after vaccination.
 - Everyone ages 6 months and older should get an annual flu vaccine.
 - A COVID-19 vaccine can be taken any time of year, so get it as soon as you are eligible.
 - Everyone ages 6 months and older should get an updated 2024–2025 COVID-19 vaccine.
 - RSV vaccines can be taken any time of the year, but getting this vaccine in late summer or early fall helps protect you from RSV when it's most common in fall or winter.
 - Everyone ages 75 and older, or 60 and older with certain health conditions, should get one dose of an RSV vaccine.
 - Even if you have had RSV before, a vaccine is still needed because you can get sick again.
 - Pregnant people should get an RSV vaccine between 32 and 36 weeks of pregnancy during fall and early winter to protect their baby after birth.
 - People can get vaccines for the flu, COVID-19, and RSV at the same time.
 - When you get your annual flu vaccine, you can get the latest COVID-19 vaccine plus an RSV vaccine, if you are eligible and have never been vaccinated against RSV.

Older adults have higher risk.

- Most deaths from flu, COVID-19, and RSV are in people older than age 65, and the risk grows with age.
- As people grow older, their immune systems do not work as well, and older adults are more likely to have health conditions that make them more likely to get sick.
 - As many as eight out of 10 flu deaths are of adults ages 65 or older.
 - Compared to adults under age 40, people over age 75 are about nine times as likely to die from COVID-19.
 - RSV is a common virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. But it can be severe, and even deadly, in older people.
 - Each year, about 60,000 to 160,000 older adults in the United States are put in the hospital due to RSV infection, and as many as 10,000 die.
- Every adult should get the 2024–2025 flu and COVID vaccines. High-dose flu vaccines that cause a stronger immune reaction are available for extra protection for adults ages 65 and older.
- All adults ages 75 and older, and those 60 and older with certain health conditions or who live in long-term care homes, should get an RSV vaccine.
- If you help care for a family member or friend age 60 or older, make sure they know about their risk for getting very sick with flu, COVID-19, and RSV and that vaccines can help protect them.
- People who get flu, COVID, or RSV after getting a vaccine are much less likely than those who did not get a vaccine to need to see a doctor or go to the hospital.

Vaccines protect pregnant people and newborns.

- Flu, COVID-19, and RSV can be very harmful to newborns.
 - Children younger than 5 years old, and especially those younger than 6 months, are at higher risk of developing serious flu-related complications.
 - About 20,000 children under age 5 in the United States are put in the hospital due to the flu on average each year.
 - Infants are more likely to be hospitalized because of RSV than for any other reason. Each year, about 58,000–80,000 children younger than 5 years old in the United States are put in the hospital due to RSV infection, with infants being at greatest risk.
- Getting vaccinated for flu and COVID-19 during pregnancy can protect the pregnant person and their baby during the first 6 months.
- An RSV vaccine during pregnancy helps protect newborns from RSV.
- Pregnant people should ask their doctor or midwife about flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines.

Vaccines are tested.

- Vaccines offer the best protection against severe disease from flu, COVID-19, and RSV.
- Vaccines go through a lot of testing—both in the lab and with volunteers—before they are available to the public.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ensures companies that make vaccines do it with care so vaccines are safe and work the way they should.
- Vaccine safety is carefully tracked. People who think they might have a health issue related to a vaccine can tell the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the FDA through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System.
- Some people have no side effects from flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines. Any side effects are usually mild and go away on their own in a few days.

- The most common side effects for respiratory vaccines are soreness or red skin where you got the shot, tiredness, fever, body aches, and headache.
- Severe side effects, like anaphylaxis, are rare. They affect only five people for every 1 million doses given.
- There is no evidence that vaccines cause or worsen conditions like cancer or infertility.
- Although vaccines keep some people from getting the flu, COVID-19, or RSV, the thing they do best is to help keep symptoms mild to keep people out of the hospital if they get infected.

Misinformation can have dangerous consequences.

- Health misinformation is information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence at the time.
- False and misleading information about vaccines causes people to make decisions that could be dangerous to their health.
- Misinformation spreads through communities, within families, and between friends. Friends and family are often trying to help when they share misinformation.
- Remember that accurate information connected to health and medicine involves rigorous research and complex science, and advice can change as more research is done.
- Talking to friends and family about the impact of misinformation can help slow the spread by helping them to think twice about what they hear, read, and share.
- Misinformation can sometimes be spread on purpose to trick people into believing something to make money or to gain power. This is called disinformation.
- Misinformation and disinformation are hard to detect because they often contain some truth. Stories can be misleading, quotes can be taken out of context, and data can be selectively used to support false claims.
- If friends or family share wrong information, listen to why they believe it, show you understand, and guide them to good sources that don't make money or gain power from the information.
- If you receive health information that seems strange, call the CDC at 800-CDC-INFO, check the CDC website, or contact your state or local health department.
- You can also ask a doctor you trust, search online for a trustworthy source, and check “About us” to see who is behind the original message. If you're still unsure, don't share it.

Visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) to learn more.

- To learn more about flu, COVID-19 and RSV vaccines, **visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)**.
- If you're age 60 or older, or if you're pregnant, talk to your health care provider about which 2024–2025 vaccines are right for you.