



## Flu and COVID-19 FAQs

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### Q: What was flu season like last year?

The 2020-21 season was an unprecedented, record-low year for influenza cases. Thousands of people were tested for flu, but only a handful of tests came back positive for the virus. Oregon saw very few hospitalizations for flu all season – it usually sees hundreds. OHA’s “[Flu Bites](#)”

(<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/diseasesconditions/communicabledisease/diseasesurveillancedata/influenza/pages/surveil.aspx>) provides weekly updates on flu cases in Oregon.

### Q: Why are health care providers so concerned about this year’s flu season during the COVID-19 pandemic?

First, some people may mistakenly believe that if they’re vaccinated against COVID-19, they’re also protected from the flu and don’t need the flu vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine is not effective against flu, nor is the flu vaccine effective against COVID-19.

In addition, while the pandemic last year forced Oregon students to attend school through distance learning, or a hybrid of distance learning and limited in-person instruction, schools have returned to full in-person instruction this year (school employees and students are still required to wear masks indoors). The biggest driver of influenza transmission during flu season is school-age children.

Finally, because most children were attending school through distance learning at home, they weren’t exposed to the many variations of influenza that often circulate each flu season but don’t make them sick, which may make them more susceptible to more severe illness from the flu.

### Q: Do you anticipate there will be more flu this year because kids are back to in-person instruction?

There could be typical flu outbreaks in schools this year. But a big difference between flu and COVID-19 is that with flu, you probably aren’t infectious until you have symptoms, while many people with COVID-19 don’t have symptoms.

In the past, some families may have allowed their children to attend school with minor flu symptoms, but concern about COVID-19, which shares some of the same symptoms with flu—fever, cough, sore throat—makes that more difficult due to COVID-19 safety protocols schools have put in place. Additionally, school employees

and students are required to wear masks indoors at all times, which should limit transmission of influenza.

**Q: Can you get a flu vaccine at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine? Am I overloading my body's immune system if I do?**

You can get the flu vaccine at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine. Or, if you just got a COVID-19 vaccine last week, there's no reason why you can't get a flu vaccine this week. There are no restrictions on that.

It's important to remember that children routinely receive vaccines for multiple vaccine-preventable diseases, including diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, chickenpox, measles, mumps, rubella and hepatitis. Those multiple vaccines, given at once, do not suppress their immune systems or make them more susceptible to disease. It's much less stress to your immune system to get the vaccine than it is to get the illness. The same is true with COVID-19 and flu; it's best to get the vaccines instead of the illnesses.

**Q: What do I need to know about COVID-19 and flu symptoms?**

Until you know whether you have flu or COVID-19, it's important to respond the same way to the symptoms both viruses share. If you experience fever, cough and sore throat, you should stay home from work or school, wear a mask, keep your distance from others and get tested, and contact your health care provider if your symptoms worsen. The two viruses share symptoms as well as steps for preventing their spread to other people.

**Q: If you get the flu, are you more susceptible to COVID-19?**

No. They are separate viruses, and while they share some symptoms—fever, cough, sore throat—having one does not make you more prone to getting the other. It is just as easy to get COVID-19 whether you have flu or not.

**Q: Is it possible to get both viruses at the same time, and would that be a horrible scenario?**

In 2020, when the COVID-19 started to spread, Oregon did have some late flu cases and hospitalizations even after the pandemic began. They can both circulate at the same time, and there were some cases of people testing positive for both. However, there is not a lot of data available on the health effects of "co-infections" with flu and COVID-19. To prevent this, your best bet is to get vaccinated for both viruses.

**Q: What are we hearing about flu on the other side of the world? What was their flu season like?**

There is nothing remarkable about data from the southern hemisphere. There's no new flu strain emerging, and it's been a light flu season in places like New Zealand and Australia. The severity of any flu season depends on how many people get a flu vaccination, if people stay home when they're sick, and how much people use face coverings when they're out in public.

**Q: Last year, because we didn't have the COVID-19 vaccine, there was a big push to get the flu vaccine. Now that we have both, is it still important immunized against the flu?**

Yes. It's certainly is just as important to get the flu vaccine this year. You don't want to avoid getting COVID-19 by getting vaccinated, just to get hit with the flu because you didn't get a flu shot.

Flu can overwhelm hospitals just as COVID-19 can. During most flu seasons, there are a lot of cases around the state, and even some deaths, particularly among young children and older adults. And flu can have a devastating effect on a highly unvaccinated population.

**Q: What is the standard recommendation for who should get the flu vaccine?**

Anyone ages 6 months and older should get the flu vaccine, particularly those who are very young, very old, or have other chronic conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes. In addition, pregnant women should get vaccinated since children younger than 6 months can't get the flu vaccine. Also, when a pregnant woman gets the vaccine, it means she not only avoids serious complications during pregnancy, but she also transmits precious flu antibodies to her unborn child. This year, the CDC says it's very important from pregnant women to get both a flu and COVID-19 vaccine to protect themselves and their unborn child.

**Q: Where can I get more information on influenza and the vaccine?**

Visit [flu.oregon.gov](https://www.flu.oregon.gov)

(<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/preventionwellness/fluprevention/Pages/index.aspx>) for more information on preventing the flu and getting a flu vaccination.

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