



September 7, 2023

Dear Colleague:

The New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) would like to inform you that the initial distribution of seasonal flu vaccine for the 2023-2024 season has begun. As influenza and SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, continue to co-circulate this year, you should use every opportunity to administer flu and COVID-19 vaccines to all your patients to reduce the burden of respiratory illnesses and protect populations at increased risk for severe illness.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) continues to recommend that all people 6 months of age and older receive an annual flu vaccine. Please vaccinate all your patients and staff, especially those at high risk for severe disease and complications from influenza, including children less than 5 years of age, people with underlying chronic medical conditions, pregnant patients, and people aged 65 years and older. During this year's flu vaccination campaign, providers should also strongly recommend COVID-19 vaccination to all patients 6 months of age and older. Providers offering both vaccines should co-administer flu and COVID-19 vaccines. Providers not offering flu and/or COVID-19 vaccination should direct their patients to visit [NYC Vaccine Finder](#) for information on where they can obtain these vaccines.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that most people should be vaccinated in September and October. Children who require two doses of flu vaccine should receive their first dose as soon as possible to allow the second dose to be received no later than the end of October. Continue to offer vaccination for as long as influenza viruses are circulating, through spring 2024 or later. During the 2022-2023 season, clinical laboratories that perform testing on NYC residents reported positive influenza test results as late as May.

### **Influenza Updates for the 2023-2024 Season**

CDC continues to preferentially recommend the use of higher-dose, adjuvanted, or recombinant flu vaccines over standard-dose unadjuvanted flu vaccines for people 65 years and older. Most seasons people 65 years and older bear the greatest burden of severe influenza, accounting for more than 80% of influenza-related hospitalizations and deaths; this is likely due to older adults' not having as strong an immune response to vaccination as younger, healthy people. The preference applies to Fluzone High-Dose (HD-IIV4 [Sanofi]), Fluad® (aIIV4 [Seqirus]), and Flublok® (RIV4 [Sanofi]) flu vaccines. If none of these three vaccines is available at any opportunity for vaccine administration, then any other age-appropriate flu vaccine should be used.

For the 2023-2024 season, flu vaccines are again available only in the quadrivalent formulation. Inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV4) and LAIV4 egg-based vaccine contain A/Victoria/4897/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus (**updated**); A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus; B/Austria/1359417/2021 (Victoria lineage)-like virus; and B/Phuket/3073/2013 (Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

Flucelvax and Flublok contain A/Wisconsin/67/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus (**updated**); A/Darwin/6/2021 (H3N2)-like virus; B/Austria/1359417/2021 (Victoria lineage)-like virus; and B/Phuket/3073/2013 (Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

For the 2023-2024 influenza season, ACIP and CDC supports the use of any age-appropriate, licensed influenza vaccine; there is no preference for one vaccine over another, except for the aforementioned preference for higher-dose and adjuvanted vaccines for those age 65 years and older, and as noted in the paragraph (two below this one) regarding FluMist.

It is no longer recommended that persons who have had an allergic reaction to egg involving symptoms other than urticaria should be vaccinated in an inpatient or outpatient medical setting supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic reactions if an egg-based vaccine is used. Egg allergy alone necessitates no additional safety measures for influenza vaccination beyond those recommended for any recipient of any vaccine, regardless of severity of previous reaction to egg, and persons with egg allergy can receive any flu vaccine that is otherwise appropriate for the recipient's age and health status. All vaccines should be administered in settings in which personnel and equipment needed for rapid recognition and treatment of acute hypersensitivity reactions are available.

FluMist should not be used in patients with cochlear implants, active cerebrospinal fluid leaks, asthma or a wheezing episode in the preceding 12 months in children aged 2 through 4 years, or concomitant aspirin- or salicylate-containing therapy in children and adolescents. It should not be used in persons who are immunocompromised due to any cause or in those persons who are close contacts of severely immunosuppressed persons who require a protected environment, or who are pregnant. In addition, FluMist should also not be used if oseltamivir or zanamivir was given within the previous 48 hours, if peramivir was given within the previous 5 days, or if baloxavir was given within the previous 17 days.

As was the case during the last few influenza seasons, all children 6 months through 59 months of age enrolled in NYC Article 47 and 43 regulated child care, Head Start, nursery and prekindergarten programs must receive one dose of flu vaccine between July 1 and December 31 of each year. Although some children may need a second dose in order to comply with ACIP recommendations, that second dose will not be required for program attendance.

### **COVID-19 and COVID-19 Vaccine Updates**

Flu vaccination should be deferred for people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of the presence of symptoms to avoid exposing health care personnel and others. Providers should minimize the potential of COVID-19 transmission during all patient visits, including flu vaccination visits, and should wear gloves when giving FluMist because of the increased likelihood of coming into contact with a patient's mucous membranes and body fluids. Use of an N95 or higher-level respirator is not recommended since administration of FluMist is not considered an aerosol-generating procedure. Providers should remove their gloves and wash their hands after administering FluMist or inactivated flu vaccine if the provider chooses to use gloves during the injection.

[Per CDC guidance](#), COVID-19 vaccine may be administered without regard to timing of other vaccines. This includes simultaneous administration of COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines, including flu vaccine, on the same day. There are additional considerations if administering an orthopoxvirus vaccine (e.g., for mpox prevention); in the [CDC guidance](#) section, under "Implementation" click on "Timing,

spacing, age transitions, and co-administration of COVID-19 vaccines,” and see the guidance under “Orthopoxvirus vaccination.”

In the fall of 2023, the U.S. Government will end its COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Program, and COVID-19 vaccine will become available on the commercial market. COVID-19 vaccines will still be free for most Americans through their health insurance plans. COVID-19 vaccine will be available via the VFC Program and, if you have uninsured adults in your patient population, please reach out to the Health Department, at (347) 396-2400, for guidance on how to obtain vaccine for these individuals.

Also in the fall of 2023, there will be a new composition to COVID-19 vaccines; they will be monovalent and contain the XBB.1.5 strain. We will be sending updated COVID-19 vaccine guidelines at a future date.

### **Flu Vaccine Coverage**

The Healthy People 2030 goal for flu vaccine is 70% for all ages. In the 2022-2023 influenza season in NYC, flu vaccine coverage with at least one dose of flu vaccine for children aged 6 through 59 months was 57% (as of June 30, 2023), compared to 59% for the 2021-2022 season. For children 5 through 8 years, the rate for the 2022-2023 season was 40%, which was a 2 percentage point drop from 2021-2022; for children 9 through 18 years the rate for 2022-2023 was 37%, which was similar to 2021-2022. The rates for all three childhood cohorts during this past season were below the (overall pre-COVID) 2019-2020 rates, with the rate for children 6-59 months of age in 2022-2023 being 9 percentage-points below the 2019-2020 rate (all data from the CIR). This downward trend of flu vaccination rates is troubling, and we urge you to help reverse this trend in the upcoming flu season.

Among people 18 years of age and older, 49% reported in the 2021 Community Health Survey that they received a flu vaccine; 69% of persons 65 years of age and older reported that they did. Non-Latino Black individuals reported significantly lower coverage, at 41%, than non-Latino White individuals (55%), Latinos (45%), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (56%).

### **Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program**

The Health Department is now accepting Vaccines for Children (VFC) flu vaccine orders; all VFC orders must be placed electronically, using the Citywide Immunization Registry (CIR), at [nyc.gov/health/cir](https://nyc.gov/health/cir). After logging into the CIR, click on the Vaccine Inventory Management (VIM) icon and select the Order Influenza tab. **Please submit an order for all the flu vaccine you will need for the entire 2023-2024 season.**

Fluzone® (IIV4 [Sanofi]), FluLaval® (IIV4 [GSK]), and Fluarix® (IIV4 [GSK]) are all licensed for use in patients 6 months and older. The following presentations can be used for children 6 months of age or older: Multi-dose vials (only to be used in children  $\geq$  3 years of age) and 0.5 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes of Fluzone; 0.5 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes of FluLaval; and 0.5 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes of Fluarix. When placing your VFC order, indicate the total amount of inactivated flu vaccine needed to vaccinate your 6 months through 18-year-old patient population. Your facility may receive any of the above products, depending on availability, and they are to be considered equivalent. FluMist® (live-attenuated influenza vaccine quadrivalent [LAIV4] [AstraZeneca]) is one of the recommended flu vaccines and can be used in children 2 through 18 years of age. The ordering screens will have a separate line to indicate the total number of FluMist vaccine doses you want to receive for the 2023-2024 season. A limited amount of Flucelvax® (cclIV4 [Seqirus]), the cell culture-based flu

vaccine licensed for patients starting at 6 months of age, will also be available through the VFC program. Due to the limited availability, providers will not be able to order *only* Flucelvax, but will be required to enter a mix of standard injectable flu vaccines, as well, if they choose to include Flucelvax in their order. If you have any questions regarding ordering Flucelvax via VFC, please call (347) 396-2489.

The VFC ordering tool is designed to help ensure that all your VFC-eligible population is properly immunized against influenza. The recommended order quantity column is an estimate of the **minimum** number of flu vaccine doses your site needs for the 2023-2024 influenza season. Please use these recommendations as a guide when ordering your flu vaccine. It is not required that you order the recommended amount — you can order more or less. You also can adjust your order in the [Online Registry](#) during the season, as needed. Flu vaccine is not included in your practice’s doses administered report (DAR) calculation, so you will not be penalized for any unused vaccine. We expect to be able to supply you with enough flu vaccine to immunize all your VFC-eligible patients; however, as in the past, you will receive partial shipments until your order is filled. The amount of and timing when vaccine will be shipped will depend on flu vaccine availability to the NYC VFC program. You will be able to track your flu vaccine shipments in the Online Registry. Please order more vaccine if you see that you are about to run out. If you need assistance with submitting your order or have questions, email [nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov](mailto:nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov) or call the VFC program at 347-396-2489.

### **Vaccine Ordering for Non-VFC Eligible Children and Adults**

Most providers and facilities placed their flu vaccine orders back in February through April. If you need to order vaccine for non-VFC eligible children and adults, you should contact the vaccine manufacturers or distributors. For a list of vaccine manufacturers and distributors, visit [izsummitpartners.org/ivats](http://izsummitpartners.org/ivats), which has been updated to reflect flu vaccines available this season. You will need to confirm product availability directly with vaccine manufacturers and distributors. Please note that New York State Public Health Law §2112, prohibits the administration of vaccines containing more than trace amounts of thimerosal to children younger than 3 years of age and to patients who know they are pregnant (pregnancy testing is not required prior to vaccination). Be sure to order enough of the preservative-free, single-dose presentations of flu vaccine to immunize all of these patients in your practice. In addition to the pediatric formulations listed above in the VFC Program section, the other non-VFC flu vaccine option is Afluria® (Seqiris), available in in 0.5 mL single-dose pre-filled syringes and multi-dose vials.

### **Vaccinating Children 6 Months Through 8 Years of Age**

In the 2023-2024 season, the recommendation for flu vaccination of children 6 months through 8 years of age is unchanged: children in this age group who have not received two doses of flu vaccine prior to July 1, 2023, will require two doses, administered at least four weeks apart. The two previous doses do not need to have been given during the same season or consecutive seasons. If a child under 9 years of age has previously received two doses of flu vaccine, the child will need only one dose this season.

### **Using the CIR for Flu Vaccination Quality Improvement**

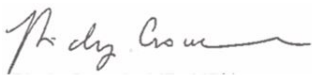
You can run your facility’s childhood flu vaccination report in the [Online Registry](#) so that you can track coverage and identify patients who have not yet received their flu vaccine. The CIR also offers tools to send patients reminder-recall text messages for vaccines that are due. Reminder-recall, in combination with other evidence-based best practices, such as using standing orders, self-screening tools, and following ACIP’s [General Best Practice Guidelines for Immunization](#), which includes information on the standards for both child/adolescent and adult immunization practices, can help to ensure that your patients’ vaccinations are up-to-date.

To create reports, once you log onto the CIR, click on “Tools” in the top row, then “Standard or Flu Coverage Report.” In the middle of the page, you will see “Influenza Coverage Report.” Indicate which age groups you would like to run coverage for (you may choose all), then click “Continue” and your reports will run. The screen will direct you to where your reports are stored. When you find your report, click on “Done” in the last column of the row that contains your report. You will then be given the option to “Create Recall List,” which will create lists, labels and letters for you. If you wish to text message your patients due for flu or any other vaccine, click on “Recall” in the top row, then choose the combination “Recall,” “Custom,” “Text Message” and “One Time” or “Recurrent,” then click on “Continue.” You will be directed to the custom recall screen and given directions on completing your text-messaging job. We encourage you to implement quality improvement activities and strive to increase coverage over last year.

You are required to report all vaccine doses administered to children 18 years of age and younger. For your adult patients, we strongly encourage you to report vaccine doses administered to the CIR with your patients’ verbal or written consent. Report complete race and ethnicity data to enable monitoring of equity coverage goals. You can also check the CIR to see if your adult patients received flu vaccine at another location. The CIR consolidates immunizations across providers and, using all reported immunizations and provides decision support in determining which immunizations are due and when they should be administered.

Please make every effort to vaccinate all your patients, using [evidence-based interventions](#) to increase coverage rates. For current information about influenza, visit [nyc.gov/flu](http://nyc.gov/flu). For questions on flu vaccine, other than those pertaining to your VFC order, call 347-396-2400 or email [nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov](mailto:nycimmunize@health.nyc.gov). As always, we will send out updates throughout the season to keep you informed. We thank you for helping to protect NYC residents from influenza.

Sincerely,



Assistant Commissioner  
Bureau of Immunization