

Editor's Note: Safety Group Program Monthly Newsletter Article — Oct. 2020

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A new kind of flu season: Amid pandemic, flu shots are especially important

Remember all the talk of “flattening the curve” last spring? People stayed home to slow the spread of COVID-19, and [in Colorado the preventive measures seemed to work](#).

Now Colorado businesses can help keep that curve flattened, this time by encouraging their employees to get a flu shot. The vaccine protects people against developing the flu, which is particularly important this year as COVID-19 and flu season intersect for the first time.

Healthcare professionals predict COVID-19 infection rates will soar during fall and winter as people spend more time indoors. Modeling projects daily [national COVID-19 deaths will peak at 2,800](#) by early December. [More than 7,500 Coloradans](#) have been hospitalized with COVID-19 to date, and more than 2,500 have died.

Pinnacol Senior Medical Director Tom Denberg, M.D., says getting a flu shot is especially critical this year. The more Coloradans can minimize their impact on the health care system during the pandemic, the better. [Colorado recorded 3,832 hospitalizations](#) during the 2019-20 flu season.

“In normal years, influenza by itself stresses the health care system. Getting a flu vaccine will help to minimize demands on healthcare providers and resources when we already know that the coronavirus is going to be a major — some public health experts say ‘catastrophic’ — challenge,” says Denberg.

Another complication? Coronavirus and the flu [share many symptoms](#), such as sore throat, fatigue and cough. Denberg warns that people developing these symptoms may worry they have COVID-19, and finding a test could be difficult.

“There will be a sharply increased need for COVID testing, but these tests are already in very short supply, and in many locations results are often very delayed,” he notes. “Because flu and COVID symptoms overlap significantly, flu will place even greater demands on already-limited COVID testing capacity.”

Getting a flu shot significantly reduces the likelihood someone will get the flu. Those who do contract flu after getting the vaccine usually suffer a shorter and less-intense bout, making them less likely to require hospitalization.

To keep employees safe, employers should work to make flu shots more accessible.

“Encouraging and facilitating their ability to get a flu vaccine will reduce absenteeism, protect your entire workforce, help the economy more broadly, and demonstrate that you care about your employees on a personal level and about the well-being of the public at large,” he says.

Here's how employers can make flu shots accessible during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Share how to get flu shots:** A health insurance provider may have pamphlets or emails for distribution. We have sent information to our team, which is now working remotely due to COVID-19.
- **Offer flu shot vouchers:** Human resources can direct employees to visit a local pharmacy to redeem the vouchers.
- **Reimburse the cost of flu shots:** Employees who show a receipt for their shot can be repaid.

Of course, businesses should also increase preventive habits such as washing hands and using hand sanitizer to decrease germ sharing, measures employers have implemented to slow the spread of COVID-19. Denberg also suggests remaining mindful of [flu season best practices](#).

Want to learn more about the flu and COVID-19? Explore our [other flu season preparation tips](#) or visit our [COVID-19 page](#).

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