

Press Release

Hamilton County Health Department



Web: health.hamiltontn.org

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

September 14, 2020

Health Department Urges Residents to Get Their Flu Shot Now

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – This flu season is going to be more challenging than ever due to the added risk of COVID-19 in our community. Influenza and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID are similar, it may be hard to tell them apart based on symptoms alone. Your healthcare provider may need to perform a test to confirm a diagnosis.

The CDC estimates that nearly 17 million workdays are lost each year due to the flu, resulting in approximately \$10 billion per year in direct medical expenses. Free tools for employers and employees can be found [here](#).

During the 2019-2020 flu season, the [CDC estimates](#) there were between 39-56 million cases of flu in the US, resulting in 410,000-740,000 hospitalizations, and between 24,000-62,000 deaths.

The flu vaccine is recommended for all persons aged 6 months or older who do not have contraindications. Those at [highest risk for serious complications](#) from the flu include children under 5 years, adults 65 years and over, pregnant women, and those with preexisting medical conditions or a compromised immune system.

The Hamilton County Health Department urges residents to get the flu vaccine as soon as possible this year. The Health Department will begin to offer the vaccine within the next few weeks at a drive-through “Point of Dispensing” (POD), but residents should not wait and should get vaccinated sooner rather than later. Detailed information will be forthcoming as the planning is still in progress. The vaccine is presently available at some area pharmacies.

Flu vaccine will not be available this year at the Health Department’s outlying clinics in Ooltewah, Sequoyah, and Birchwood as they remain temporarily closed due to the COVID response. The Homeless Healthcare Center will continue to serve transient and homeless individuals.

“It is possible for a person to get both the COVID-19 virus and the influenza virus at the same time or back-to-back,” said County Health Officer Dr. Paul Hendricks, “You can protect yourself and others from influenza by getting the flu vaccine early this year, wearing a mask, social distancing, washing hands frequently, and staying home if you are sick with any kind of symptoms.”

The flu vaccine will not prevent COVID-19.

[According to the CDC](#), common symptoms shared by COVID and the flu include:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle pain of body aches

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- Headache
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

Differences:

- COVID may include a change in or loss of taste and smell.

Additional similarities include:

- Both COVID and flu spread from person-to-person by respiratory droplets produced when talking, coughing, or sneezing.
- Close physical contact (e.g., shaking hands) or touching a contaminated surface can transfer the virus.
- Pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic people are infectious to others.

For these reasons, wearing a mask and social distancing will reduce the risk not only of spreading either virus but also of contracting either virus. Other important prevention tools include frequent handwashing and sanitizing, frequent cleaning of common touch surfaces, and stay at home if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

A more complete list of similarities and differences between COVID and the flu can be found [on this CDC website](#).

This flu season, if you need to see a healthcare provider for any symptoms, call their office first before showing up to ask about COVID protocols.

For more information, call the Health Department's COVID hotline at (423) 209-8383 or visit these Health Department resources:

- Website: <http://health.hamiltontn.org/>
- English Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonTNHealthDept/>
- Spanish Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SaludHamiltonTN/>
- Subscribe to the English mailing list: <https://landing.mailerlite.com/webforms/landing/j6u3e5>
- Subscribe to the Spanish mailing list: <https://landing.mailerlite.com/webforms/landing/h4c2i4>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/HamiltonHealth>
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