



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Joint Statement of the Bay Area Health Officers

## Bay Area Health Officials #FightFlu, Urge Flu Shots Staying Up to Date on Preventive Vaccines Even More Important during COVID-19 Pandemic

Health officials from across the Bay Area are asking the public to fight the flu by getting the annual vaccination for influenza right now. Each winter, people sick with flu crowd hospitals and urgent care clinics, resources that may be strained due to COVID-19. Early and timely flu shots can prevent a disease that hospitalizes 200,000 Americans every year.

It is important to get a new flu vaccine each year. The flu vaccine offers protection for many months, but not forever. Also, the strains of influenza circulating in the community change over time, and the current vaccine offers protection against those strains.

To keep yourself and your family out of the hospital, doctors recommend an annual flu shot for everyone age 6 months or older. The flu shot is a safe, effective way to reduce your chance of missing work or ending up in the hospital due to severe flu. Symptoms of the flu can be similar to early symptoms of COVID-19, meaning that this year, people with flu symptoms may require a COVID-19 test and may need to stay home from work and isolate away from their families while awaiting results.

In the Bay Area, as is the case across the state and the country, the percentage of children up to date on immunizations has fallen as parents delay routine visits to their pediatricians, which is a serious concern. An annual flu shot visit is a great time for kids to catch up on all vaccinations.

For those with insurance, under the Affordable Care Act, a flu shot is available without cost as a preventive service from your regular doctor or most pharmacies. For those without health insurance, or anyone who finds it more convenient, there are many opportunities to get a free flu shot at community clinics, COVID-19 test sites, or mass vaccination events.



A schedule of free flu vaccine clinics in San Mateo County is available here: [smchealth.org/flu](https://smchealth.org/flu)

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Flu is not COVID-19, which is caused by a different virus. Flu is not the same as the common cold, which is caused by different viruses.

It takes about two weeks for the flu vaccine to become effective after you get the shot, so getting vaccinated in advance of the arrival of severe flu in the Bay Area offers the best protection.

While the flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months and older, it is especially important for pregnant women, children younger than 5, adults 65 and older, and those with chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes. People who live in the same household with someone at high risk can help protect that person from severe flu by getting a flu shot.

Health officials advise individuals to take the following steps to protect themselves and loved ones from flu.

- Get the flu vaccine every year.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your cough and sneezes.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick and keep your children home when they are sick.
- Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue.
- Wear a face covering and maintain at least a six-foot distance from others in public settings.

For more information about flu, visit [smchealth.org/flu](https://smchealth.org/flu). Find more locations near you that offer flu vaccine using the [Vaccine Finder](#).

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