



NEWS RELEASE

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2020-2021 INFLUENZA SEASON – COVID-19 PREPARED

Influenza (commonly called “flu”) is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. These viruses are spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes or touches a surface handled by others. It can be mild or severe and infects millions of Americans every year. The CDC estimates that 56 million people in the U.S. on average, yearly get the flu. According to the statistics, 37,000 deaths have occurred yearly over the past decade. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Greenwich Department of Health’s flu clinics will take all the necessary precautions to reduce person to person interaction while vaccinating the public. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic changes in the flu vaccination process will include, but will not be limited to:

- * Offering a limited number of flu vaccination clinic’s with extended hours
- * Offering an accommodated senior flu clinic (with others welcomed)
- * Offering a drive-thru vaccination clinic
- * Offering only flu shots at scheduled clinics with an option for other adult and child immunizations
- * Required Online Vaccination Consent Form completed, signed and brought to the clinic
(Vaccine Consent Form for Easter Greenwich Civic Center here:
<https://www.greenwichct.gov/575/Health-Department>)
- * Required Online Registration and Vaccine Consent Form completed, signed and brought to clinic
(Online registration and Vaccine Consent Form for Drive-Thru Clinic here:
<https://www.greenwichct.gov/575/Health-Department>)

The seasonal influenza viruses historically begin to circulate in the fall of each year. The virus that causes COVID-19 disease is continuing to circulate in the U.S., including the State of Connecticut. The number of COVID-19 cases may increase due to environmental conditions such as drop in temperature, humidity and of course people moving indoors. It is possible to get the flu as well as other respiratory illnesses and COVID-19 at the same time. Therefore, the CDC highly recommends that everyone get vaccinated against the flu by the end of October 2020.

Each year the seasonal influenza vaccine contains three or four influenza virus strains. In 2020-21, the influenza seasonal vaccine will contain one Influenza A-like (H3N2) virus, one Influenza A-like (H1N1) virus and either one or two Influenza B-like viruses. The seasonal influenza vaccine (quadrivalent influenza vaccine) and ~~new quadrivalent high dose vaccine for people 65 years of age and older~~ will be offered (**October 6, 2020- HIGH DOSE VACCINE - NOT AVAILABLE FROM DISTRIBUTOR*) The viruses in the flu shot are inactivated (not live), so **you cannot get the flu from a flu shot**. Some minor side effects that could occur include: low grade fever, muscle soreness or aches. Influenza can affect anyone; however, those 65 years of age and older have a higher risk for complications from

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influenza. Usually people experience a rapid onset of high fever (although not all individuals exhibit fever), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, chills, headache, fatigue and body aches.

It is important to understand that the influenza vaccine is not protective against COVID-19. Although influenza (flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, they are caused by different viruses. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the differences between them based on symptoms alone. People who are experiencing respiratory or flu-like symptoms such as body aches, fever, sore, cough and stuffy nose, should consult their health care provider as soon as possible, as testing for COVID-19 will most likely be needed. To avoid exposing health care personnel and other people to your illness, it is best to always call ahead before visiting the doctor's office or emergency room. If you think you have COVID-19 and have difficulty breathing, notify Town's Emergency Dispatch Center when you call 911 that you think you may have COVID-19.

Director of Health, Caroline C. Baisley, emphasized, "your annual flu shot is the best, most effective way to provide protection against circulating influenza viruses. The traditional flu season begins in October and runs through May in most years. Sustained influenza transmission is usually not seen before January or later. Many people at higher risk from the flu, also seem to be at higher risk for COVID-19. Health experts encourage people to take advantage of the multiple health care providers that offer flu shots in the community. Those providers include pharmacies, local health departments, primary health care offices, walk-in clinics and stores with pharmacies." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all persons 6 months of age and older should be immunized; however, it is especially important for the following groups to receive flu vaccine:

- All children aged 6 months through 59 months; all persons aged 50 years and older, especially adults over 65
- Persons 6 months of age and older with underlying chronic medical conditions such as asthma, cardiovascular disease (except isolated hypertension), diabetes, neurological, hepatic or renal disorders and immunosuppression, that require frequent or ongoing medical management.
- Women who are or will be pregnant during the influenza season and two weeks after pregnancy
- Household contacts, including children, of persons at high risk due to medical conditions and/or infants under six months of age
- Healthcare workers and residents in long term care facilities and nursing homes
- Persons who are morbidly obese (Body Mass Index (BMI) ≥ 40)
- American Indian and Alaskan natives

Note: Seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended for all persons aged 6 months of age and older, however, immunizations will not be administered to individuals under 18 years of age at the Department of Health immunization clinics. Parents are advised to contact their pediatricians for an appointment and dose requirements for children six months to eight years of age. For additional information about how to obtain a flu vaccination from the Department of Health for children under age 9 years or other vaccines for children and adults, please contact the Division of Family Health at (203) 622-7861 or (203) 622-6495.

Who Should NOT Get the Seasonal Flu Shot

- People who had a **severe allergic reaction** to eggs. (Persons with a history of egg allergy, who have experienced only hives after exposure to egg, should receive influenza vaccine. In this case, vaccine should be administered only by a physician who is familiar with the potential manifestations of egg allergy.)
- People who have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine in the past or are allergic to other components of the vaccine, including egg protein, etc.
- People who previously developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting a flu shot

- **People younger than age 65 should not receive the ~~Fluzone High Dose vaccine~~**
*(*October 6, 2020) HIGH DOSE VACCINE -NOT AVAILABLE FROM DISTRIBUTOR*

- Children less than 6 months of age
- People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait until their symptoms lessen before receiving a vaccination

- **Consult your primary care provider about Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV) – nasal spray contraindications or precautions. The Department of Health will not carry LAIV – nasal spray.**

“Although the single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated, there are other ways to protect you from flu and other respiratory illnesses,” states Director of Family Health, Deborah C. Travers.

- Seek medical care early. Consult your medical provider immediately if you develop flu symptoms.
- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.**
- **Stay home from work or school when you are sick** Keep your distance from others when you are sick, except to seek medical care. Your fever (100° F and above) should be gone for at least 24 hours without using fever reducing medications or antiviral drugs. It could take up to one week or more to feel better.
- **Take flu antiviral medications if your doctor prescribes them.**
- Wear a mask in public, in work settings and other designated areas.
- **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue when you sneeze or cough
- **Wash your hands** with soap and water frequently. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based cleaners (at least 60% alcohol ingredient) are effective.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth** to prevent the spread of germs.
- **Get plenty of sleep, water, healthy food and exercise**
- **Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces** that may be contaminated with germs.

Children Under age of 18 are not eligible for Department of Health’s influenza clinics.

Seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended for all persons aged 6 months of age and older, however, immunizations will not be administered to individuals under 18 years of age at the Department of Health’s clinic. Parents are advised to contact their pediatricians for an appointment and dose requirements for children six months to eight years of age. For additional information about how to obtain a flu vaccination from the Department of Health for children under age 9 years, please call (203) 622-7861 or (203) 622-6495.

Pneumococcal and Other Adult Vaccines

Due to the restrictions of COVID-19, the Department will not be offering pneumonia or other adult vaccinations at the scheduled community flu clinics. The CDC recommends pneumococcal vaccination (PCV13/Prevenar13® or PPS23/Pneumovax23®) for adults 65 years or older. However, both pneumococcal vaccines and other adult vaccines such as shingles (Shingrix) are available at the Department of Health year-round. Call (203) 622-6495 for additional information about receiving a pneumonia vaccine or other recommended vaccines for adults.

During the influenza season, the public is encouraged to call the Department of Health flu information hotline for up-to-date information at **(203) 622-3774**, or visit the Department’s website main page at <https://www.greenwichct.gov/575/Health-Department>. COVID-19 information is also available on the Department’s Webpage. For questions about COVID-19 contact the Department of Health at these open phone lines: 203-622-7865; 203-622-7703; 203-622-7614; 203-622-7842; 203-622-7836.