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**Department of Health
and Social Services**

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STATE OF ALASKA

JOINT RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Getting vaccinated against flu is more important than ever; all Alaskans age six months and older should get their annual flu shot

October 5, 2021 ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) are teaming up to urge Alaskans to get vaccinated against the flu before the end of October. Getting an annual flu shot will help protect you and others from the flu – and help prevent additional strain on Alaska’s health care system.

The flu is responsible for hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and tens of thousands of deaths annually in the United States, according to the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov). In Alaska, flu causes a significant impact that varies annually. For more information, please visit flu.alaska.gov.

“We are not seeing a lot of flu cases yet but now is best time to get your shot – before flu begins circulating widely,” said Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anne Zink. “A lot of Alaskans are asking how they can help our health care workers. Please get a flu shot as soon as possible! It’s simple and effective and will help keep all of us healthy this winter – and help protect our health system too. Please don’t wait – vaccinate today.”

It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the body to build immunity against the flu.

Flu vaccine is safe and has a proven track record of reducing influenza infections. Flu vaccine greatly reduces the chances of getting the flu and helps prevent serious illness, hospitalization and death associated with flu.

Flu shots can be co-administered with other vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine. If you’re seeing a provider to get your COVID-19 vaccine or a Pfizer booster dose, check to see if you can get a flu shot

too. Many, but not all, vaccine clinics will be offering both vaccines at the same time this year for convenience and efficiency.

Flu vaccination is part of a comprehensive public health strategy to keep Alaskans healthy, reduce the burden of flu and preserve resources for COVID-19 patients and others who may need health care. Flu vaccine does not prevent COVID-19 but it is the best defense against the flu. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, Alaskans are encouraged to get a COVID-19 vaccine and continue measures of mask wearing, physical distancing, keeping social circles small and hand washing.

“Getting vaccinated against COVID-19, influenza and all recommended vaccine-preventable diseases is critically important,” said Dr. Bob Onders, Alaska Native Medical Center administrator. “Particularly now as COVID-19 cases are surging in Alaska, we need all Alaskans to do what they can to protect their health and help ease the burden on our health care system.”

DHSS and ANTHC recommend annual flu vaccination for everyone six months and older. Essential workers who encounter others outside their homes along with residents and caregivers in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities are at higher risk for flu.

Those at higher risk of getting severe flu disease include:

- Pregnant women and children under five years of age.
- People 50 years and older.
- Adults and children who have chronic medical conditions like lung disease, asthma, heart disease, diabetes, neurologic disorders, and weakened immune systems, or those who are extremely obese.
- Alaska Native people and other racial groups who are disproportionately affected by chronic medical conditions that can increase the risk for severe flu or COVID-19.

Stay informed:

- CDC Flu webpage: [cdc.gov/flu/](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/)
- DHSS Influenza webpage: [flu.alaska.gov](https://www.flu.alaska.gov)
- ANTHC webpage: [anthc.org](https://www.anthc.org)

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