



FLU SEASON FACTS

For the 2020-2021 season

Influenza viruses circulate in the United States most commonly from late fall through early spring. Although most people recover from flu without serious complications, it can result in illness, hospitalization, and death. Getting an annual flu shot is critical especially during this flu season as we continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. **Please encourage your patients to get the vaccine.** Widespread flu vaccination will help lessen the strain on our healthcare system during the pandemic.

CDC RECOMMENDATIONS

For the 2020-2021 flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends use of licensed, age-appropriate flu vaccines, administered via a needle, nasal spray, or jet injector.

Most members will have no out-of-pocket cost

We follow the CDC and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations for the 2020-2021 season. **Flu immunization is covered *without a cost to most our members*.** We recommend that you always check member benefits and eligibility before performing services.

Recommended flu vaccines¹

The CDC recommends the following vaccines for the 2020-21 flu season. You can click on the blue text for links to informational websites:

- [Standard dose flu shots](#)
- [Fluzone high-dose quadrivalent vaccine](#) (for people 65 years and older)
- [Shots made with adjuvant](#) (for people 65 years and older)
- [Cell-based flu vaccines](#) (no eggs are involved in the production of this vaccine)
- Shots made using a vaccine production technology ([recombinant vaccine](#)) that do not require having a candidate vaccine virus (CVV) sample to produce
- [Live attenuated \(weakened\) influenza vaccine](#) (the nasal spray flu vaccine, FluMist)

New 2020-2021 flu season vaccines

Two new vaccines are licensed for use in adults 65 years and older for this flu season:

- Quadrivalent high-dose vaccine. This replaces the previously licensed trivalent high-dose vaccine.
- Quadrivalent adjuvanted vaccine. This is similar to the previously licensed trivalent vaccine containing MF59 adjuvant with one additional influenza B component.

Additional information can be found on the CDC website.²

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/acip/summary/summary-recommendations.htm> and <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/acip/2020-2021/acip-table.htm>

BILLING AND REIMBURSEMENT

- Use the appropriate CPT, HCPCS, or revenue code to bill for seasonal flu vaccine ordered from a manufacturer or distributor.
- An invoice isn't required.
- Reimbursement is based on our fee schedule for vaccines.
- For contracted providers and vendors, if you have a specific code list in your contract, be sure to bill only those codes on your fee schedule.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE FLU VACCINE

Pediatric

We provide **separate reimbursement** for the administration or injection of routine pediatric immunizations regardless of whether the immunization is part of an office visit.

Adult

- We do *not* provide **separate reimbursement** for the administration or injection of vaccines for adult preventive vaccines when administered as part of an office visit.
- We **do** reimburse administration or injection of immunizations given independent of office visit.

Blue Cross does not reimburse you for vaccine supplied by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) Immunization Program.

- Please use the **SL modifier** on your claim for tracking purposes.
- Using this modifier will not affect how your claim processes.

RECOMMENDED 2020-2021 FLU VACCINE

The CDC reviews the composition of flu vaccines in the United States annually and updates them to match circulating flu viruses. Flu vaccines protect against the three or four viruses (depending on the vaccine) that research suggests will be most common. The vaccine takes two weeks to become effective once administered.

For the 2020-2021 northern hemisphere influenza season⁴, WHO has recommended the following composition:

Trivalent (three-component) egg-based vaccines should contain:

- A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus (updated)
- A/Hong Kong/2671/2019 (H3N2)-like virus (updated)
- B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus (updated)

Quadrivalent (four-component) egg-based vaccines, which protect against a second lineage of B viruses, should contain the three recommended viruses above, plus B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (Yamagata lineage) virus.

Cell- or recombinant-based vaccines should contain:

- A/Hawaii/70/2019 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus (updated)
- A/Hong Kong/45/2019 (H3N2)-like virus (updated)
- B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus (updated)
- B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (Yamagata lineage) virus

Blue Cross covers all the CDC and ACIP recommended flu vaccines this season.

Patients who should consult their provider before obtaining the vaccine

Patients should talk with their healthcare provider before being vaccinated if they:

- Have an allergy to eggs, or any other ingredient in the vaccine.
- Have had Guillain-Barre syndrome.
- Are currently ill with a fever.
- Are suspected or diagnosed with COVID-19³. These patients should postpone vaccination until they have met the criteria to indicate they no longer need to isolate.
 - This will avoid exposing healthcare personnel and other patients to the COVID-19 virus.

High-risk groups

Some people are at high risk of serious flu complications. Many of these populations are also at high risk of serious COVID-19 complications.

Health and age factors known to increase risk of getting serious complications from flu:⁴

- Asthma
- Blood disorders, such as sickle cell anemia
- Chronic lung disease such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and cystic fibrosis
- Endocrine disease, such as diabetes
- Heart disease, such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease
- Kidney diseases
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders, such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders
- Neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions
- Obesity with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher
- A weakened immune system due to disease (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or some cancers such as leukemia) or medications (such as those receiving chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer, or person with chronic conditions requiring chronic corticosteroids or other drugs that suppress the immune system).
- People younger than 19 years old on long-term aspirin or salicylate-containing materials

Other people at high risk from the flu:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Children younger than two years old
- Pregnant women and women up to two weeks after the end of pregnancy
- American Indians and Alaska Natives
- People who live in nursing homes and long-term care facilities

³ https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm#anchor_1591372261934

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/index.htm>

MEMBER COST BY PLAN TYPE

- **HMO, PPO, POS, Access BlueSM**
None if provider is participating (unless flu vaccine is administered with other covered services – such as an office visit – that *are* subject to member out-of-pocket cost).
- **Federal Employee Program**
Refer to [Federal Employee Program Service Plan Brochures](#) and feblue.org.
- **Medicare Advantage**
None.
- **Indemnity**
None, unless the member has a grandfathered plan design, in which case member may have some cost.
- **Additional notes**
Home health care providers won't be reimbursed for a separate nursing visit unless the member is having an authorized home health care service performed without member cost.

For **skilled nursing facilities** (SNF), reimbursement applies only when the member is receiving custodial services at your SNF and the SNF is the member's home at the time of service. If these services are performed as part of inpatient care, they will be covered under your facility's per diem rate. Remember: always check member benefits before performing services, and please submit all claims directly to us.

WHERE CAN MEMBERS GET A FLU VACCINE?

In Massachusetts Blue Cross members can receive a flu vaccine at any of the locations below *as long as services are rendered by a participating provider*:

- Community health centers
- Doctor's office
- Limited service clinic
- Home health care provider in the member's home or at a senior center
- Hospital-based outpatient clinic or hospital outpatient department
- Pharmacy
 - For members over age 3 only
 - No prescription required
 - Pharmacists must be registered, licensed, and participate with Express Scripts (ESI)
- Public access clinic sponsored by cities and towns (some cities and towns offer clinics with no charge to the resident; others may request a member ID to bill Blue Cross)
- Skilled nursing facility when member is receiving outpatient custodial services, such as physical or occupational therapy
- Urgent care center

Outside Massachusetts members can go to any **Blue plan-participating** provider.

- Members can use our Find a Doctor & Estimate Costs tool (bluecrossma.com/findadoctor) or bcbs.com to locate a Blue Cross provider. Or, they can visit vaccines.gov/get-vaccinated/where.
- Only Medicare Advantage members can receive reimbursement for flu vaccines obtained from a *non-participating* provider.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Flu Fact section of our MyBlue member website at bluecrossma.com/wps/portal/members/healthier-living/get-educated/flu-facts
- The CDC site: cdc.gov/flu/index.htm
- [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#)