



STATE OF WASHINGTON

September 17, 2021

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COVID-19, INFLUENZA, AND PNEUMOCOCCAL REMINDER

Dear Provider/Superintendent/Administrator:

It is more important than ever to protect your residents/clients and staff from COVID-19, flu, and pneumonia during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Flu and COVID-19 are both highly contagious and expected to circulate in Washington this fall. Staff, visitors, and newly admitted residents can easily bring these illnesses into your facility/home. Your residents/clients can develop severe illness from flu and COVID-19 including complications like pneumonia. Some of these illnesses can be fatal. Learn more about the [similarities and differences](#) between flu and COVID-19.

The flu and COVID-19 vaccines are your best protection against these illnesses. Since it is possible to have flu or other respiratory illnesses AND COVID-19 at the same time, the flu and COVID-19 vaccines will lower one's risk for these illnesses, help protect essential health care workers, and help save limited health care resources for those who need it most. **To minimize the impact of COVID-19, flu, and pneumonia in your facility/home:**

1. Encourage ALL residents/clients and staff to get the COVID-19 vaccine, the flu vaccine by the end of October, AND encourage residents/clients and staff to get the pneumococcal vaccine as needed. Washington currently requires the COVID-19 vaccine for: [Health care workers and long-term care workers](#). Employees are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (at least two weeks after finishing the vaccine series) by October 18, 2021. The requirement includes contractors, volunteers, and any other positions that work in these settings. Currently, three vaccines are authorized or approved and recommended in the United States to prevent COVID-19: Pfizer-BioNTech (COMIRNATY), Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson (Janssen). [FDA has granted full approval](#) for Pfizer-BioNTech (COMIRNATY) COVID-19 vaccine for individuals 16 years of age and older. Visit the Department of Health's COVID-19 vaccine webpage, www.CovidVaccineWA.org, for up-to-date information on how to get the vaccine and for materials to share with your residents/clients.

The flu vaccine is updated every year to protect against the most common strains. Fall is the best time to get vaccinated because it ensures protection before flu begins to circulate widely. There are specific flu vaccines for those aged 65 years and older, such as [Fluzone High-Dose](#) and [FLUAD](#), which are intended to give additional protection from flu. Flu, pneumococcal, and COVID-19 vaccines may be administered at the same time. Staff who have not received the flu vaccine before the end of October should get vaccinated as soon as possible. Review the [interim guidance for immunization services](#) to help plan for the safe administration of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information on immunizations for seniors, visit www.doh.wa.gov/Immunization/Seniors.

2. Wash your hands and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently. Many of the [healthy habits used to prevent flu](#) also help prevent [COVID-19](#). Promote proper hand-washing among your staff and residents/clients to minimize germs.

Think of it as your best defense. Get a flu vaccine. Visit www.knockoutflu.org

- 3. Wear a face mask.** Due to the emergence of highly contagious variants of COVID-19, it is a [requirement](#) for everyone over five years of age wear a mask in public indoor settings. Masks may help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading this virus (and other viruses) to others.
- 4. Call your local health department whenever a resident /client tests positive for COVID-19 or flu. Also call if you see a sudden increase in acute respiratory illness (two or more ill residents/clients within 72 hours).** Your local health department can advise on testing, antiviral treatment, prophylaxis, and infection control. Visit www.doh.wa.gov/localhealth to find your local health department.
- 5. Report a suspected outbreak of COVID-19, flu, or any other communicable disease to the Department of Social and Health Services [online](#) or by calling the hotline at 1-800-562-6078. [This chart](#) can help you identify common symptoms and differences between COVID-19, flu, the common cold or allergies.**
- 6. Review your facility/home's ability to implement infection prevention standards and meet the health care needs of residents/clients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or flu.** A facility/home can admit/readmit a recently ill resident/client if the facility determines they can meet all care and service needs AND follow infection control standards. For infection control guidance, visit www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/5100/fluoutbrk-LTCF.pdf. You can also view the [Long-Term Care Facility Toolkit: Preparing for COVID-19 Vaccination at Your Facility](#) for information and resources to help build vaccine confidence among staff and residents. The following additional resources can help you prepare for heightened flu activity:
 - Department of Health: www.knockoutflu.org
 - Department of Social and Health Services: See Flu Information/Adult Immunization Resources at www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/residential-care-services/residential-care-services
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/flu and www.cdc.gov/Features/Pneumonia
 - Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP) Vaccine Recommendations: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs
 - Consider registering for the Washington Flu Fighter Facility recognition program to identify and overcome barriers related to vaccinations: [Flu Fighter Facility Award: Washington State Department of Health](#)

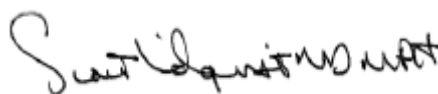
We encourage you to continue to adhere to the **Standards for Adult Immunization**, which include routinely **assessing** the immunization status of all residents/clients and **strongly recommending** and encouraging vaccines based on the needs of each resident/client. If your facility/home provides immunizations, please **administer** and **document** all vaccines given. If your facility/home does *not* provide immunizations, please **refer** residents/clients to a vaccination provider and **document** that vaccines were given. For more information about the **Standards for Adult Immunizations**, visit www.doh.wa.gov/Immunization/Adult/StandardsforAdultImmunizationPractice.

Thank you for your continued efforts to help fight flu and COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Mike Anbesse, Director
Residential Care Services
Department of Social & Health Services



Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH
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Washington State Department of Health

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