

## COVID-19 Response and Reactivation Update

### August 27: Impact of the 2020-21 Flu Season and NM Vaccination Requirements

Today's issue features information from Infectious Disease Specialist Michael G. Ison, MD, MS, FIDSA, FAST, about the anticipated impact of the 2020-21 influenza season on the COVID-19 pandemic. It also provides details about the annual Northwestern Medicine Flu Vaccination Program and the process for meeting compliance requirements.

#### 2020-21 FLU SEASON

Influenza and other respiratory viruses cause annual outbreaks of respiratory illness, with most occurring late November through April. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), there are approximately 12 million (range 4.3 to 21 million) excess clinic visits, 250,000 excess hospitalizations (range 140,000 to 810,000) and 35,000 excess deaths (range 12,000 to 61,000) directly attributed to influenza each year.

During peak flu season, the healthcare system has an increase in clinic visits and hospitalizations. Combined with the potential burden of caring for patients with COVID-19, our facilities could experience significant volume increases as patients present with respiratory illnesses this winter. As such, we need to optimize preparations for the coming influenza season by encouraging flu vaccines, developing plans for evaluation and triaging patients with clinical infection, and preparing our resources for the increase in patients seeking care.

Thankfully, many of the interventions that are currently being leveraged for COVID-19 — mask use, physical distancing and hand hygiene — also work to prevent influenza and other respiratory viruses. According to a [report](#) from the Australian Government Department of Health, cases of influenza in the Southern Hemisphere are at record lows. If we maintain vigilance and drive influenza vaccine rates higher, we can hope to mitigate the potential for a severe respiratory season when SARS-CoV-2 co-circulates with other respiratory viruses.

Testing remains a critical component to differentiate influenza, SARS-CoV-2 and other respiratory viruses. [Differentiating influenza from SARS-CoV-2](#) and other respiratory viruses can be difficult based on clinical presentation. Therefore, diagnostic testing is required to definitively differentiate the various viruses. Careful monitoring of the local epidemiology of respiratory viruses, as found on the [Illinois Department of Public Health Influenza Surveillance web page](#), can assist with estimating the likelihood of a patient with respiratory illness having a specific virus.

If the patient is known to have influenza, or clinical and epidemiologic factors suggest influenza, antiviral therapy with a neuraminidase inhibitor (oseltamivir, peramivir or zanamivir) or the

polymerase inhibitor baloxavir can reduce the duration of symptoms and complications of influenza if started within 48 hours of symptom onset. For patients requiring hospitalization, the benefit extends beyond 48 hours. For a complete summary of antiviral medications for the treatment of influenza, please visit the [CDC website](#).

### NM FLU VACCINATION PROGRAM

The annual NM employee and physician Flu Vaccination Program launches Tuesday, September 1, and will be in effect through December 1. As part of our responsibility as healthcare providers — and to protect your patients, your family, yourself and each other — NM requires all physicians serving on the medical staff of an NM hospital to be vaccinated.

Once again, NM will provide free flu vaccinations to all medical staff physicians. To comply with physical distancing guidelines, physicians and staff working on clinical units are encouraged to get vaccinated within their department by a designated Flu Prevention Captain. Clinical unit vaccinations will be available starting the third week of September. Flu vaccination stations also will be available across the health system for nonclinical staff beginning in October. To reduce wait times, please complete the flu consent form prior to arriving for your vaccination by visiting the [Seasonal Influenza Flu Program page](#) on NMI (login required): **NMI > MyNM Service Center > Health & Safety > Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Program**.

To comply with NM flu requirements, individuals must do one of the following by December 1:

- Get vaccinated within a clinical area by a designated Flu Prevention Captain
- Get vaccinated at a designated flu vaccination station
- Get vaccinated by your personal physician or another provider, and submit documentation on **NMI > Applications > Safety & Risk > Immunization Doc Upload**
- Apply and receive an approved medical or religious accommodation

For more information about specific vaccination times and locations, please visit the [Seasonal Influenza Flu Program page](#) on NMI (login required): **NMI > MyNM Service Center > Health & Safety > Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Program**.

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Thank you to all NM physicians and clinicians for your ongoing commitment, collaboration and leadership in providing exceptional *Patients First* care.



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