

TO: Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature  
FROM: Children's Wisconsin, UW Health, BioForward, Marshfield Children's Hospital, Wisconsin Medical Society and the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
DATE: August 24, 2020  
RE: **Vaccines More Important Than Ever**

While COVID-19 remains top-of-mind for most everyone, we are quickly moving into flu season and more than ever, it is essential to be vaccinated for the flu. This is true of adults **and children** – even for those not returning to school in a traditional sense in the fall. The CDC recommends everybody over 6 months of age needs an influenza vaccine *every year* that is appropriate for their age and health status. And since influenza season is unpredictable and can start by October, getting vaccinated as soon as possible when the vaccinations are available is important.

Every year, influenza takes a great toll on the health and well-being of the US population and the American health care system. Data for the 2018–2019 influenza season from the CDC shows that influenza was associated with more than 35.5 million illnesses, more than 16.5 million medical visits, 490,600 hospitalizations, and 34,200 deaths. While these statistics are alarming, add in the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and it is easy to understand why it's important to reduce exposure to the flu in 2020-2021, especially in light of the fact that being infected with COVID-19 at the same time as the flu could result in more severe illness. Furthermore, a combined surge of COVID-19 cases and influenza cases could push the already strained US health care system to the brink of disaster.

It is for these reasons that we encourage you to share the facts with your constituents. Please alert them to the need for the flu vaccine, especially for older adults and young children who are most vulnerable to health complications that can lead to hospitalization and death. Fortunately, you can share with great confidence the fact that the influenza vaccine(s) is safe and has a history of being effective, particularly for vulnerable populations. For example, a study published in 2017 in the journal [Pediatrics](#) demonstrated that flu vaccination significantly reduced a child's risk of dying from the flu. The study, which looked at data from four flu seasons between 2010 and 2014, found that flu vaccination reduced the risk of flu-associated death by 50 percent among children with underlying high-risk medical conditions and by nearly 65 percent among healthy children.

On a related note, the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend children and adults continue to receive their **routine vaccinations** during the COVID-19 outbreak. Well-child visits and vaccinations are essential services that help to make sure children are protected against diseases like measles and whooping cough which can spread dramatically when children are not immunized.

We are fortunate to be living in a time when most major diseases can be prevented by effective and safe vaccines. According to CDC and every medical professional organization, the United States has the safest vaccine supply in history. Those words are particularly comforting in the midst of this pandemic as scientists and researchers turn their attention to developing a vaccine for COVID-19. The stage is set for success, but it is our responsibility to take advantage of the scientific advances that have already been made by getting vaccinated now for those diseases that can be controlled. It is important to get as many people vaccinated as possible so that we can worry less about the flu and other vaccine preventable diseases and focus on curtailing COVID-19. We do this for ourselves and for each other.

*Thank you for your consideration. If you have questions, please contact Jodi Bloch, Children's Wisconsin (608) 217-9508, Connie Schulze, UW Health (608) 422-8063, Jordan Lamb, BioForward (608) 252-9358, Tony Langenohl, Marshfield Children's Hospital (608) 444-5076, HJ Waukau, Wisconsin Medical Society (608) 442-3807 or Kia Kjensrud, Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (262) 751-7003.*