

## Covid Vaccine Fall 2024 Guidance

Covid continues to cause serious infections across the U.S. A recent study showed that people hospitalized this past winter with covid were 60% more likely to die than those hospitalized with influenza. In total 43,700 Americans died and 419,000 were hospitalized with covid last fall and winter. Most of these hospitalizations and deaths were among seniors, but people of all ages with underlying health problems, including young children with asthma and other health conditions, are at increased risk. Long covid is also an ongoing concern at all ages. Long covid can result in chronic health problems, ranging from severe fatigue to lung damage that causes asthma in children and COPD in adults.

Even if you don't end up with a bad case of covid, you can be indirectly impacted. When our local ER fills up with people who get sick this winter, that results in delays in care for people with appendicitis, injuries from car crashes, cancer complications, and other urgent health problems. The more people in Calvert who are vaccinated, the less virus that spreads through the community. In turn, there are fewer high-risk people lying in ER and hospital beds when nurses and doctors are needed for other health problems.

It is extremely important for grandchildren and anyone living with or caring for the elderly to be vaccinated. The most common way that grandparents become infected is through unintentional spread from their grandchildren. Also, those visiting and working in retirement communities and nursing homes should be up to date on their vaccinations. This is an important reminder that everyone, including parents of young children, have a role to play in preventing serious illness.

Everyone from very young children (6-months or older) to seniors should get an influenza vaccine and a covid vaccine in mid-late October. It's safe to get them at the same time, or you can split them by 2 weeks if that makes you feel more comfortable. Keep in mind that it takes your body 2 weeks to develop protective antibodies after a vaccine is given, so you shouldn't wait until people around you start getting sick. You certainly want protection before virus spread surges around Thanksgiving.

Both the influenza and covid vaccines are newly formulated each fall to best match the strains of viruses that are circulating in the U.S. Although last year's covid vaccines were "only" about 50% effective in preventing people from catching the virus, they lowered the chance of severe illness by 75-80%. For younger people who are vaccinated, this means they are less likely to miss a week of school or work, and for older adults, they are much less likely to be hospitalized or die.

The first year covid vaccines were available, there were very few variants and the vaccine effectiveness was over 90%. Last year, new variants appeared after the vaccine was developed. This lowered the overall effectiveness to about 50%. The variants currently circulating have been stable since late March. At this time, the match for the newly formulated fall 2024 covid vaccine looks better. It's likely that protection against even mild infection will be closer to 70% and prevention of severe illness will be ever greater.

Please make the time to visit your doctor's office or pharmacy to receive an updated vaccination. All insurances cover vaccines recommended by medical experts, including this year's updated covid shot. They are available without any copay. Vaccines save lives and keep millions healthier every year. If you have questions or concerns, you may find reliable information on the internet, but the best source of trusted advice is from your personal doctor or nurse practitioner.