

Adam Crum
Commissioner

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**Department of Health
and Social Services**

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STATE OF ALASKA

JOINT RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Clinton Bennett, DHSS, (907) 269-4996, clinton.bennett@alaska.gov
Shirley Young, ANTHC, (907) 268-1014, media@anthc.org

Getting vaccinated against flu is more important than ever; all Alaskans age six months and older should get their annual flu shot

October 2, 2020 ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) are teaming up this year to urge Alaskans to get vaccinated against the flu before the end of October. Getting an annual flu shot will help protect Alaskans from the flu – and hopefully prevent dual epidemics of COVID-19 and seasonal influenza that would place further strain on Alaska’s health care system.

“Flu cases start to rise in the fall and, in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, making sure Alaskans are as healthy as possible is more important than ever. That means taking care of our physical and mental health and getting our flu vaccine,” said Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anne Zink. “Getting a flu shot is something we can all do to help keep ourselves and others healthy this winter. Don’t wait – vaccinate.”

Flu vaccination is part of a comprehensive public health strategy to reduce the burden of flu and preserve resources for COVID-19 patients and others who may need health care. Flu vaccine does not prevent COVID-19 but it is the best defense against the flu. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, Alaskans are encouraged to continue measures of [mask wearing](#), [hand washing](#), [physical distancing](#) and observing guidance from federal, state and local health officials.

Flu vaccine is safe and has a proven track record of reducing influenza infections. While it does not prevent *all* flu illness, it greatly reduces the chances of getting the flu and also helps prevent serious illness, hospitalization and deaths associated with flu. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for the body to build immunity against the flu. If you have concerns about whether flu vaccine is right for you, please contact your health care provider.

“Getting the protection of a flu shot is critically important this fall for the health of each individual and the overall health of our communities,” said ANTHC’s Dr. Robert Onders. “As COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Alaska, it’s important to minimize other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu, from spreading throughout our state.”

DHSS and ANTHC recommend annual flu vaccination for everyone six months and older. Those at higher risk of getting severe flu disease include:

- Pregnant women and children under five years of age
- People 50 years and older
- Adults and children who have chronic medical conditions like lung disease, asthma, heart disease, diabetes, neurologic disorders, and weakened immune systems, or those who are extremely obese.
- Alaska Native people and other racial groups who are disproportionately affected by chronic medical conditions that can increase the risk for severe flu or COVID-19.
- Residents and caregivers in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- Essential workers who encounter others outside their homes.

Stay informed:

- CDC Flu webpage: [cdc.gov/flu/](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/)
- DHSS Influenza webpage: flu.alaska.gov
- ANTHC webpage: anthc.org



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