Flu vaccination: 6 tips to win over the undecideds

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With each day seeing tens of thousands of new coronavirus cases in the U.S., the impending flu season is raising fears of a “twindemic” of COVID-19 and influenza that could sicken tens of millions of Americans and further strain the nation’s health system resources.

This raises anew the critical role that physicians play in doing whatever they can to ensure that all patients 6 months and older get the influenza vaccine. One key area for focus this year are the patients who haven’t made up their minds about whether to get the flu shot.

That’s a big group of people. About 40% of Black and Latinx patients are undecided about getting a flu vaccine this season, as are 24% of white patients, says a July survey by the Ad Council, which has joined the AMA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to launch a campaign, “No One Has Time for the Flu.”

"The flu vaccine is a safe, effective step that physicians and public health experts recommend to protect patients and their loved ones from getting sick with influenza,” said AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD.

Black patients are nearly twice as likely to be hospitalized for flu as white patients, with 68 in 100,000 landing in a hospital bed during influenza season. That’s according to a CDC analysis of the 10 most recent flu seasons, and it’s a trend compounded by the tragic inequities seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, which is sending Black and Latinx patients to the hospital at five times the rate of white patients.

Here are six tips from the AMA, CDC and Ad Council on key points physicians can raise with those still on the fence about the flu shot.

Keep yourself from getting sick
Flu vaccines prevent millions of people from getting the flu every season. During the 2019–2020 flu season, flu vaccines prevented an estimated 8.7 million people from getting the flu, 105,000 flu-related hospitalizations, and 6,300 flu-related deaths.

Learn about the eight things doctors wish patients knew about flu shots.

**Save medical resources**

During the 2019–2020 flu season, the flu caused an estimated 18 million medical visits. Getting a flu vaccine can help to reduce the burden on doctors and nurses as they fight COVID-19. Last season, flu vaccines prevented 3.7 million medical visits.

Find out why it’s so important to get patients vaccinated to help avoid a double whammy flu season.

**Protect your loved ones**

A flu vaccine helps protect the people around you who are more likely to get very sick from the flu, such as babies, young children, pregnant women and older adults.

Discover the six ways physicians can do boost flu vaccination among children.

**Protect people with diabetes and heart disease**

People with certain chronic conditions are at high risk of getting very sick from flu, including being hospitalized or even dying. Getting a flu vaccine reduces the risk of giving the flu to people with asthma, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and sickle cell anemia.

**Save time**

Getting a flu vaccine can prevent you from getting sick with flu. People who get the flu are usually sick for about a week. Staying healthy means you can be there for your loved ones who depend on you.
Reduce severity of illness

You may still get the flu if you get a flu vaccine, but you won’t get as sick. Flu vaccines have been shown in several studies to reduce severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick.

“We are not hopeless and helpless against the flu,” AMA Immediate Past President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, recently told MSNBC. “We have a tool in a toolbox and that is getting a flu vaccine.”

Learn more at GetMyFluShot.org, created by the AMA, CDC and the Ad Council. The website also is available in Spanish at VacunateContraLaInfluenza.org.