

# 2023-2024 SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



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Page 1

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## **VACCINATION INFORMATION**

### **Q1: Do I have to get a seasonal influenza (flu) shot?**

**A:** For the safety of you, our team members, our patients and our community, **all** TriHealth team members and non-employed personnel are required to get a seasonal influenza (flu) shot by November 3, 2023.

Team members and non-employed personnel must be in compliance with the Influenza Vaccination for Employed and Non-Employed Personnel policy by November 3, 2023. Failure to comply with the Influenza Vaccination for Employee and Non-Employed Personnel policy will result in performance counseling up to and including termination.

### **Q2: Are agency workers, contractors, volunteers, students, and vendors at TriHealth required to get a flu vaccine?**

**A:** Yes. Anyone who is issued a TriHealth badge must follow the same flu vaccination requirements as TriHealth-employed team members.

### **Q3: When and where can I get a flu shot?**

**A:** TriHealth Employee Health will be giving flu shots starting September 25, 2023. Information about times and locations can be found on TriHealth Bridge or from your leader.

**THE LAST DAY FLU SHOTS WILL BE GIVEN BY EMPLOYEE HEALTH IS NOVEMBER 3, 2023. The last day to submit your flu vaccine record from a physician's office or another community vendor is also November 3, 2023.**

### **Q4: Which vaccine is being provided by TriHealth Employee Health during the 2023-24 seasonal flu vaccination campaign?**

**A:** Employee Health will primarily be providing the standard quadrivalent vaccine preparation. Depending on availability, different manufacturer brands with different components will be used. We will also have a limited supply of Flublok, which is egg-free, for those team members who can only receive an egg-free vaccine due to an egg allergy. If needed, it is available upon request in Employee Health. There will also be a limited amount of high-dose influenza vaccine available upon request in Employee Health. Team members age 65 years and over can also receive the high-dose vaccine through their own healthcare provider network.

Flu vaccines must be ordered six months in advance, but what is received is always subject to delays in manufacturing/distribution. The brands we receive are subject to change based on availability.

### **Q5: What if I don't want to wait until TriHealth has received its vaccine supply and it is available for my area?**

**A:** You don't have to wait for TriHealth to provide your vaccination. Some provider offices and clinics will receive their vaccine shipments before others due to differences in manufacturers, distribution, and clinical priority. If you want to get your vaccine sooner than is scheduled for your area, you may get your vaccine from any **outside provider in your health insurance network**. However, you must provide documentation that your vaccine was appropriately received somewhere else.

# 2023-2024 SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



EMAIL: [FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com](mailto:FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com)

Page 2

---

**Q6: Can I get the flu vaccine if I am allergic to eggs?**

**A:** Yes, you may safely receive a flu vaccine containing no egg protein if you are not allergic to any of its other vaccine components. TriHealth will have a limited supply of an “egg-free” vaccine (Flublok).

**Q7: Can I receive the egg-free vaccine from Employee Health due to my vegan dietary preference?**

**A:** No, due to the limited supply of the egg-free vaccine for team members, it is only available to those who cannot take the standard vaccine due to a medical contraindication.

If you want to have an egg-free vaccine only due to dietary preferences, you may get the egg-free vaccine from an outside provider in your health insurance network. You will be required to provide documentation that your vaccine was appropriately received somewhere else.

**Q8: Should I get the flu vaccine that has a “high dose” or made with adjuvant if I am 65 years or older?**

**A:** CDC recommends that adults 65 years and older preferentially receive any type of high dose or adjuvanted influenza vaccine in the 2023-24 influenza season. If the vaccine is not available at an opportunity for vaccination, any age-appropriate influenza vaccine may be given. There is a limited amount of high-dose influenza vaccine available upon request in Employee Health, usually available later in the TriHealth flu vaccination campaign. Team Members who want the high dose flu vaccine are encouraged to be vaccinated by their PCP or pharmacy when available.

**Q9: Will the egg-free vaccine and the high-dose vaccine be available during all flu vaccination sessions?**

**A:** No. Due to the limited supply, the egg-free and the high-dose vaccines can only be given by appointment in one of the TriHealth Employee Health offices.

**Q10: Do I have to provide documentation if I was vaccinated by my primary care physician (PCP) or a non-TriHealth source?**

**A:** Yes, you must provide documentation of your vaccination by November 3, 2023 to TriHealth Employee Health if you were vaccinated by your primary care physician, even if your physician is in the TriHealth healthcare system, or by a non-TriHealth source. Submit your flu vaccination documentation using the link on Bridge.

**Q11: If I submitted documentation for a medical or religious declination last flu season and it was approved, do I need to submit documentation again this year if I am declining the flu vaccine for the same reason?**

**A:** Yes, you need to complete and submit a declination form every year you are declining the flu vaccine, even if it is for the same reason. Religious and Medical declination forms are due, completed in full, by **October 27, 2023**. Team members are encouraged to first consult with their medical providers to determine if there may be a current preparation of the flu vaccine that they may be able to take safely.

Team members who receive approvals for their submitted documentation must wear a mask when in close proximity (within 6 feet) of patients for the duration of the defined influenza season. This mask requirement is in addition to any other masking requirements TriHealth has in place.

# 2023-2024 SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



EMAIL: [FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com](mailto:FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com)

Page 3

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**Q12: How do I submit my documentation to request approval for a medical or religious declination?**

**A:** Team members should complete a TriHealth 2023-2024 Flu Shot Campaign Medical or Religious Declination Form (“declination form”), which can be found on TriHealth Bridge.

- Use the appropriate form for the reason of the declination: medical reason or religious reason.
- Clearly print and complete the form in full answering all questions, sign and submit the form. Incomplete forms will be returned as denied. You will be able to resubmit completed forms prior to the due date.
- Submit the completed declination form with the medical or religious documentation for approval by **October 27, 2023**, according to the instructions on the form:
  - Medical Declination: email the form to [FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com](mailto:FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com).
  - Religious Declination: email the form to [HRBP@TriHealth.com](mailto:HRBP@TriHealth.com).
- Keep a copy for your records.

**Q13: What if I don’t want to get the flu shot or wear the surgical mask?**

**A:** Team members who decline the seasonal flu shot and refuse to wear the surgical mask will not be allowed to work. Team members will have the option to apply for an administrative leave (60 days maximum) by contacting the HR Service Center at (513) 569-5950. Administrative leaves cannot be requested through Oracle. If your leave is approved and you are not compliant with the requirements at the end of your 60 days, TriHealth will accept this as your voluntary resignation from TriHealth. Failure to comply with the Influenza Vaccination for Employee and Non-Employed Personnel policy will result in performance counseling up to and including termination.

**Q14: What is the last day of employment for team members who fail to obtain the flu vaccination (and have not received an approved declination)?**

**A:** Team members who have not received a flu vaccination, an approved declination, or an approved administrative leave by November 3, 2023 will be considered non-compliant. The non-compliance will be accepted as their voluntary resignation. The last date of employment for non-compliant team members will be November 4, 2023.

**Q15: What is the flu season duration?**

**A:** The flu season duration is from December 16, 2023, through March 31, 2024, unless the presence of flu is found in the community before December 16, 2023, or continues after March 31, 2024.

**Q16: How long are the flu vaccines active?**

**A:** Flu vaccines are active for the entire flu season.

**Q17: Since we are receiving the flu vaccine in October and November, will it need to be repeated since the flu season runs through March?**

**A:** The vaccine will not need to be repeated since it is active for the entire season.

**Q18: Can my family member also get a seasonal flu shot through TriHealth Employee Health?**

**A:** Due to our supply volume we provide the flu vaccine only to our team members. We encourage family members to see their primary care providers or other sources to obtain the flu vaccine.

# 2023-2024 SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



EMAIL: [FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com](mailto:FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com)

Page 4

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**Q19: When and where are seasonal flu shots available through TriHealth Employee Health?**

A: The flu shot schedule is on [TriHealth Bridge](#).

**Q20: Is the “nasal spray” flu vaccine (FluMist) acceptable for this season?**

A: Yes, the FluMist vaccine is approved for use in the 2023-24 flu season for ages 2-49 years, however, the FluMist vaccine will not be available from TriHealth Employee Health. If you receive FluMist elsewhere, be certain to provide the required documentation to TriHealth Employee Health.

## **MASK INFORMATION**

**Q21: When must I wear a surgical mask?**

A: Team members who have an approved medical or religious reason for not getting the flu vaccine will need to wear a 3-ply surgical mask when within 6 feet of patients if they are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions, starting when TriHealth determines that flu season visitor restrictions are required and continuing until these restrictions are removed.

**Q22: What about unimmunized (did not receive a flu shot) team members who are on the patient units but do not have direct contact with patients? Will they need to wear a mask?**

A: Any team member with a medical or religious reason who does not receive the flu vaccine must wear a surgical mask within 6 feet of patients if they are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions, starting when TriHealth determines that flu season visitor restrictions are required and continuing until these restrictions are removed. Also, all team members should practice good hand hygiene, along with respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

**Q23: Which masks are needed for team members who cannot be immunized (get the flu shot)?**

A: Team members unable to be immunized for medical or religious reasons are required to wear a 3-ply surgical mask when within 6 feet of patients if they are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions.

**Q24: How frequently should surgical masks be changed?**

A: Surgical masks must be changed if they get wet, dirty or contaminated. If there is a serious shortage of surgical masks, it may be necessary to wear a surgical mask for more prolonged periods than normal. Your supervisor will be able to tell you how often you may replace your mask, depending on current supplies. If there is any doubt about the condition of your mask, it should be replaced as soon as possible.

**Q25: Are front desk staff who greet and/or discharge patients required to wear a surgical mask if they do not receive the flu vaccine?**

A: Any team member with a medical or other reason who does not receive the flu vaccine must wear a surgical mask within 6 feet of patients if they are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions. This applies to both clinical and non-clinical team members who come within close proximity to patients. Surgical masks are to be worn under these circumstances for the duration of the flu season.

# 2023-2024 SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



EMAIL: [FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com](mailto:FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com)

Page 5

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## **Q26: What about new team members?**

**A:** The HR Talent Acquisition team will inform the candidate of our flu vaccine requirement. The candidate can bring evidence of receiving a flu vaccine to Employee Health before their corporate orientation day.

The new team member may start working after receiving their flu vaccine. They must wear a surgical mask within 6 feet of patients if they are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions while building their flu immunity.

If the team member is approved for a medical or religious declination, they must wear a surgical mask within 6 feet of patients if they are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions. The declination must be submitted and approved before their corporate orientation date.

If the team member does not submit documentation, have an approved declination, or receive the vaccine before their orientation date, their offer of employment will be rescinded, and they will not be permitted to attend orientation or start working.

## **Q27: What about team members returning from a pre-approved Medical or other Non-Flu Administrative LOA?**

**A:** Team members scheduled to return from a pre-approved Medical or other Non-Flu Administrative leave of absence during flu season must contact Employee Health before their return for Employee Health to update the team member's flu vaccine status.

If the team member received or receives the flu vaccine after December 15, 2023, the team member must wear a surgical mask when within 6 feet of patients, if they are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions, for the two-week (14 days) period of building flu immunity.

## **Q28: What about team members returning from unpaid Administrative Leave?**

**A:** Team members will only be able to return from their unpaid administrative leave once they comply with the flu vaccine requirement.

## **GENERAL FLU INFORMATION**

### **Q29: Where can I get more information about the flu and the flu vaccine?**

**A:** The CDC website has the latest information about the 2023-24 flu season and the flu vaccinations. It is updated regularly as the season progresses, and you can even sign up to get updates sent to you automatically. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>.

### **Q30: How can I prevent the transmission of all respiratory infections in healthcare settings, including flu?**

**A:** There are many ways to help prevent the spread of respiratory infections, including:

- Practice good hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.
- Contain respiratory secretions by covering your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- Perform hand hygiene after having contact with respiratory secretions and contaminated objects/materials.
- Provide tissues and no-touch receptacles for used tissue disposal.

# 2023-2024 SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



EMAIL: [FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com](mailto:FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com)

Page 6

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- Provide conveniently located dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub. At sinks, ensure that supplies for hand washing are consistently available.
  - Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. They hold the most germs, and they are the easiest path for germs to enter the body.
  - Observe Droplet Precautions (i.e., wearing a surgical mask when within 6 feet of patients, if you are not already required to wear a mask for COVID-19 or any other infection control precautions), in addition to standard precautions, when examining a patient with symptoms of a respiratory infection, particularly if fever is present.

### **Q31: What do I do if I get sick with the flu?**

**A:** If you are sick with the flu, you should:

- Stay home from work or school. Report your illness to your leader if you are scheduled to work.
- Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid running errands when you are sick.
- Take over-the-counter (OTC) medications to relieve the symptoms of flu. (Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever.)
- Consult your doctor early on for the best treatment and/or if your symptoms do not improve and/or become worse.
  - Serious illness from flu is more likely in people age 65 years and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions, and young children.
  - Antiviral drugs may be prescribed by your physician soon after you get sick (within two days of the start of symptoms).
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. They hold the most germs, and they are the easiest path for germs to enter the body.
- Do not return to work until at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (temperature >100°F) without the use of fever-reducing medicines.

### **Q32: If I cannot work because I have the flu, is the lost work time covered by FMLA protection?**

**A:** Team members who cannot work less than three days will be subject to the current policies in place. Team members who are otherwise eligible for FMLA protection must use FMLA time if they cannot work more than three days, they have medical complications of the flu, or if they are hospitalized due to the flu. In all cases, your treating physician must provide the required documentation to the Leave of Absence team.

## **FLU AND COVID-19\***

### **Q33: What is the difference between Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19?**

**A:** Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but different viruses cause them. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a newer coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2), and flu is caused by infection with [influenza viruses](#). Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis. Flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, but there are some critical differences between the two.

# 2023-2024 SEASONAL INFLUENZA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



EMAIL: [FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com](mailto:FluDocumentation@TriHealth.com)

Page 7

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**Q34: Will there be flu along with COVID-19 in the fall and winter?**

**A:** While it's not possible to say with certainty what will happen in the fall and winter, CDC believes it's likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be spreading. In this context, getting a flu vaccine will be more important than ever. CDC recommends that all people six months and older get a yearly flu vaccine.

**Q35: Can I have flu and COVID-19 infections at the same time?**

**A:** Yes. It is possible to have flu and other respiratory illnesses and COVID-19 at the same time. Health experts are still studying how common this can be. Some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are [similar](#), making it hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. Diagnostic [testing](#) can help determine if you are sick with the flu or COVID-19.

**Q36: Will a flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?**

**A:** Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19; however, flu vaccination has many other important [benefits](#). Flu vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization, and death. Getting a flu vaccine this fall will be more crucial than ever, not only to reduce your risk from flu but also to help conserve potentially scarce healthcare resources.

**Q37: Does a flu vaccination increase your risk of getting COVID-19?**

**A:** There is no evidence that getting a flu vaccination increases your risk of getting sick from a coronavirus, like the one that causes COVID-19.

**Q38: Can the flu vaccine and COVID-19 vaccine be given at the same time?**

**A:** Yes, the flu vaccine can be given any time before or after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. If they are given at the same time, they should be administered in separate arms.

## **RELATED INFORMATION**

**Q39: Are we placing alcohol hand cleansers at the entrances and encouraging visitors to use them before visiting?**

**A:** Respiratory etiquette stations are placed at critical high-volume entry points at the hospitals.

**Q40: Will we be enforcing proper handwashing protocols?**

**A:** We all should be following proper handwashing procedures all the time, and we should kindly remind each other that this is an essential practice.

**Q41: Who should I contact if I have another question?**

**A:** Please talk to your leader.

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\*Resource:

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 1600 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30333, USA  
1 800 CDC INFO (1 800 232 4636); TTY: (888) 232 6348; 24 Hours/ Day – [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)  
For more information, go to [www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm)*