



**Expect the Unexpected
this Flu Season**



Introduction

As the nation continues the journey back to a new form of normalcy with COVID-19 vaccination adoption across a growing number of demographics, many experts are still cautious about the implications of the 2021/2022 flu season. While cases and deaths have seen new peaks and valleys in pockets of the country during the summer months, the infection rate will rise again in the fall and could be significantly higher by winter. Without herd immunity—which experts say needs to be around 70% (now upgraded to 80% with new COVID-19 variants emerging)—uncertainty rules the day. To prevent this revival, experts believe we need a vaccination rate of 80%-85% by the end of the year.¹

When adding in the wide gap in the percentage of people who have been vaccinated by state (as of September 2021, a low of 38.45% in Mississippi and a high of 68% in Vermont²) and the implications of the normal seasonal flu, there are varying opinions about how healthcare facilities should approach the upcoming season. In addition, changes in policy toward school reopenings, and the rapidly evolving recommended vaccination age range for children under 18, are leaving many with more questions than answers. The fact that people were social distancing and wearing masks during the normal 2020/2021 flu season may also be a factor as infection rates were very low last year, hence people may choose to forego the recommended annual flu vaccination.

To help policymakers make appropriate decisions for the remainder of 2021 and into 2022, The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has compiled guidance that should be considered as part of a strategy for how we handle upcoming fluctuations in COVID-19 infection rates, the seasonal flu strains that will emerge later in the year, and the necessity for booster COVID-19 vaccinations.

Read more to learn about the unknowns of this year's seasonal trends, and what your healthcare facility should consider in order to prepare for what's next.

1. What Experts Predict From COVID This Fall and Winter, <https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210520/what-experts-predict-from-covid-this-fall-and-winter>

2. States Ranked by Percentage of Fully Vaccinated, September 3rd, <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/public-health/states-ranked-by-percentage-of-population-vaccinated-march-15.html>

The Precarious Supply Chain: What You Should Know

The CDC's guidance for vaccination and flu strategies covers a wide range of outcomes³. In some places, the robust demand for flu vaccines and the supplies required to support flu vaccination efforts—like needles or syringes—could cause some providers to run out of vaccine supplies before their next shipment has arrived. To combat this, the CDC is recommending that vaccine providers stay updated on supply chain issues and any other guidance that may emerge during the coming months.

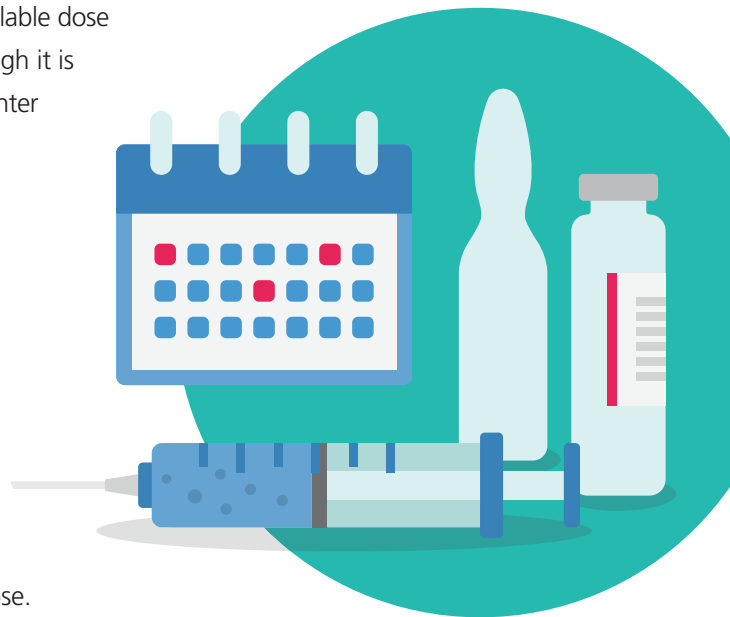
Vaccine manufacturers have said that they will produce between 194 and 198 million doses of seasonal flu vaccine this year. While this isn't enough for every person in the U.S. to receive a flu vaccine, past adoption supports that not everyone chooses to get vaccinated. For example, last season, only about half of Americans chose to get a flu vaccine and, in general, there are many doses of flu vaccine that go unused every season.



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That said, demand for the flu vaccine may be greater this season because of the COVID-19 pandemic. And while it would be unusual, it is possible that all flu vaccines will be used this season. The CDC has set a goal for every available dose of flu vaccine to be used in the coming season. In addition, even though it is impossible to predict with certainty what will happen in the fall and winter months, the CDC believes it's likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be spreading, hence the necessity for the seasonal vaccine is heightened.

Finally, the issue of COVID-19 booster shots is also top of mind for policymakers and consumers alike. Per a recent article in The Wall Street Journal⁴, manufacturer studies are currently underway to determine the need for booster shots. The argument towards a COVID-19 booster is further emphasized because of current and unknown variants that are cropping up across the globe. As early as April 2021, Pfizer, for example, noted that their vaccine remained effective for six months following the administration of the second dose.



3. Frequently Asked Influenza (Flu) Questions: 2020/2021 Season, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm>

4. Do I Need a COVID-19 Vaccination Booster Shot, June 21st, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-vaccine-booster-11623421703>

AMN Healthcare Can Help You Plan for the Following Challenges

COVID-19 has taught many that planning and preparation are key components to consider as the seasons transition to cooler months.

The range of issues that healthcare organizations must account for during the upcoming fall and winter seasons include:	How can Healthcare Organizations properly plan for these issues?
Clinician Burnout Rates (at all-time highs). Nurses, for example, have seen their burnout rate grow from 40% pre-pandemic to 70% as of January 2021	Increased flexibility with contingent labor, including time off requests and start dates
Shortages of both permanent and temporary personnel as the country fully reopens and the population returns for elective surgeries and checkups	Decreasing the time it takes to get clinicians onsite, such as streamlining interview requirements and reevaluating essential compliance documents
Uncertainty about vaccination supplies and the staff to administer care on a moment's notice	Planning ahead for the right personnel to administer COVID-19 booster shots (if/when warranted) as well as flu shots as flu season ramps up
Back-to-school flareups that may precipitate new shutdowns and decreases in available staffing as childcare issues reemerge	Securing the clinicians needed, including 26 week assignments and early extensions
Return-to-work mandates for onsite employees across many industries	Keeping abreast of return to work mandates that could push available clinicians into private enterprise and impact clinician availability
Scheduled time off (maybe even mandatory breaks) for full-time personnel and a corresponding coverage strategy	Earlier scheduling of staffing needs to combat these shortages

Let Us Partner With You

AMN Healthcare fully understands the need to help our clients maintain the appropriate staffing levels no matter the situation. And, while demand for coverage across the country remains high, you can trust that AMN Healthcare has the widest range of solutions available to tackle your staffing needs.

Whether you need travel nurses, per diem coverage, block booking/master booking coverage, permanent staffing assistance, or a combination of staffing services, we can provide the nurse, physician or ancillary staffing you need to administer flu and COVID shots or help your facility maintain coverage across a large group of specialties.

We can connect you to the largest and most diverse pool of nurse staffing candidates, including RNs, CNAs, LPNs and MAs ready to report to your facility. In addition, we have staffing solutions for locum tenens, interim leadership and other healthcare professionals to help fill any facility's needs.

You Can Trust AMN Healthcare for All Your Fall and Winter Staffing Needs



The largest healthcare staffing firm, according to Staffing Industry Analysts, for both Nursing and Allied.



We strive to provide our caregivers with every resource possible, giving them confidence and peace of mind to make a difference in your organization.



Over 30 years of reliable local, daily, short and long-term healthcare staffing.

Preparation is the Key to Success: Let Us Guide You

With increasing permanent staff burnout and a growing need for contingent labor coverage, clients need a partner who can take the burden off of their growing list of staffing demands.

AMN Healthcare offers a wide variety of nurse, physician and ancillary staffing services to help our healthcare partners properly plan for what's ahead.

DON'T BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD. GET STARTED WITH YOUR PLANNING NOW.

Contact us today at AMNhealthcare.com/nursing-fall-winter to request a call from one of our client partners.