

September 29, 2023

To the Editor:

This fall, in a historic first, we have three tools to protect us from respiratory illnesses: flu shots, the updated COVID vaccine, and RSV immunizations. These tools can prevent serious illness, hospitalization, and death from influenza, COVID-19, and RSV.

Despite many believing “it’s just the flu,” each year in the U.S., the CDC estimates that seasonal influenza causes between 140,000 and 810,000 hospitalizations and 12,000 and 61,000 deaths (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/index.html>). A flu shot reduces your risk of severe flu-related illness by 40% to 60% (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/vaccines-work/vaccineeffect.htm>). For your best shot at prevention, everyone six months and older should get their flu shot before the end of October.

COVID cases have been rising (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/us/covid-cases.html>), but we now have an updated vaccine created to target currently circulating coronavirus strains more closely. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were approved by the FDA and recommended by the CDC in September (<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/interim-considerations-us.html>). These vaccines significantly reduce the risk of developing severe COVID-19 complications and hospitalization, ultimately protecting against avoidable severe illness or death.

There are now immunizations designed to protect infants and older adults from RSV. RSV is a common virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms, but it can be much more severe for infants and older adults and lead to hospitalization. Each year in the U.S., up to 80,000 children under the age of five are hospitalized due to RSV infection (<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/p-0803-new-tool-prevent-infant-hospitalization-.html>) and among older adults, it causes approximately 60,000–160,000 hospitalizations and 6,000–10,000 deaths (<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/s0629-rsv.html>).

These three tools are safe and will protect you from serious illness while reducing strains on healthcare resources and our workforce.

Staying current on recommended immunizations is the quickest, cheapest, and easiest way to protect your and your loved ones’ health. If you have questions about vaccines, please speak with a healthcare provider.

The Indiana Immunization Coalition (IIC) offers all CDC-recommended immunizations each Monday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. at their office at 6919 E 10th St Building C, Suite 2 in Indianapolis. In addition to open office hours, IIC holds various clinics across the state. Visit <https://vaccinateindiana.org/events/> to find a clinic near you.

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