

Vaccines can Tamp Down Danger from COVID, Flu, and RSV

By Jeff McGaw

COVID, Influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can pose serious health threats to young children, older adults, and those with compromised immune systems. Vaccines and common sense are the best defense.

When Capital Blue Cross offered onsite vaccinations for employees at its Susquehanna Township headquarters recently, Tiffany Wilbert didn't hesitate to roll up her sleeve.

"Vaccinations not only protect me, but others I care about," Wilbert said. "I have small children who are in the public school system, and we need all the help we can get when it comes to preventing flu and COVID. Connecting with family and close friends is important to me, and vaccines help me feel better and safer about doing that."

The so-called triple-demic threat of COVID, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is again emerging this fall and can pose a serious health threat, especially for the elderly, the very young, and those with chronic disease and compromised immune systems, according to Dr. Jeremy Wigginton, chief medical officer at Capital Blue Cross.

"Vaccines can prevent the virus in some, and ease symptoms, shorten recovery time, and reduce the likelihood of transmission in those who do contract the virus," he said. "When vaccinations are up, hospitalizations are down, and that will reduce any undue strain on our hospitals and healthcare providers."

3 Viruses, 3 Vaccines

- **Flu:** It takes about two weeks for a flu shot to take full effect. While September and October are the best time to get a flu shot, vaccination even as late as December and beyond can be beneficial, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [The CDC recommends](#) that everyone six months of age and older get the flu vaccine every season with rare exception.
- **COVID:** [The CDC also recommends](#) everyone six months of age and older receive the updated 2023-2024 COVID vaccines. Vaccine effectiveness declines as the virus changes over time. The updated booster offers better protection.
- **RSV:** Infants and older adults, people with other risk factors, and those who live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities are at highest risk of serious illness and complications from RSV. The [CDC recommends](#) one dose for all infants younger than 8 months who are born during – or entering – their first RSV season. People 60 and over and others with increased risk factors should talk to their provider to decide if getting the RSV vaccination is the right move.

Here to Help

Capital Blue Cross' medical and pharmacy plans cover the vaccines at no member cost share when received from an in-network provider.

Many Capital Blue Cross employees, like Wilbert and Kati Cornman, recently took advantage of temporary onsite vaccine clinics at company locations in Harrisburg and Allentown.

"I try my best to be healthy and want to be there for my family 110%," said Cornman. "So, for me, getting vaccinated has been a no brainer."

Shots aren't hard to find. Most doctors' offices, pharmacies, health clinics, and health departments offer them, and some pharmacies allow online scheduling.

"Given their health value and how easy it is to get them, vaccines simply make sense," Dr. Wigginton said. "But vaccines aside, don't forget about the simple steps to staying healthy: Wash your hands frequently, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and stay home when you don't feel well."