

# GETTING A FLU SHOT MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE



People living with HIV are at higher risk of getting very sick if they get the flu, if they have a very low CD4 cell count (weak immune system) or are not taking medicine to treat their HIV (antiretroviral therapy, or ART). It is important to get a flu shot every year, but this year it is especially important, due to COVID-19.

Getting both the flu and COVID-19 at the same time could be very serious. People with HIV, especially those aged 50 or older and those with other chronic health conditions, are at increased risk for more severe illness, which could increase the seriousness of COVID-19. COVID-19, like the flu, can cause breathing problems. Both can lead to pneumonia, other serious health issues or death.

## PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE FLU

Get a flu shot! Even if you don't have a regular health care provider, you can get a flu shot at a health department or pharmacy. People without health insurance should contact their local health department to ask about flu vaccination clinics (Call the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Disease Prevention Hotline at 800-533-4148 for contact information). Get your flu shot before the end of October. Flu season lasts until May, so anytime between September and May still offers protection. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to help you make antibodies to protect you from the flu.

Protect yourself and others both from COVID-19 and the flu by:

- wearing a mask when you are around people you don't live with;
- washing your hands often with soap and water or using a hand sanitizer with 60% or more alcohol;
- practicing physical distancing (keeping at least six feet away from others);
- staying away from others if you feel sick and avoiding others who are sick; and
- covering your coughs and sneezes

## IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE THE FLU

Because flu vaccines do not offer 100% protection, people living with HIV who get flu symptoms (such as a fever, cough, chills or body aches) should call their doctor right away. Your doctor will probably test you for both the flu and COVID-19. If you have the flu, you can get antiviral drugs that can shorten the length and severity of the flu. This treatment needs to be started within 72 hours of symptoms.

## TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH

Take care of your immune system by drinking plenty of water, eating healthy foods, exercising and getting enough sleep. The healthier you are, the better chance you have of fighting off illnesses such as the flu and COVID-19. If you need assistance applying for medical insurance, please call the VDH Virginia Medication Assistance Program (VA MAP) Hotline at 855-362-0658.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

FLU: [www.vdh.virginia.gov/flu](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/flu) or [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

COVID-19: [www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus)